

Sermons Preached by the Rev. Raymond Shaheen, D.D.

<u>Year: 1983</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
January 16, 1983	"Here and Now"	1 John 3:2
January 23, 1983	"When Disappointment Comes"	Romans 1:13
February 6, 1983	"Harnessing Interruptions"	Colossians 4:5
February 13, 1983	"A Good Question"	Luke 10:25
February 20, 1983	"Sins That Crucified Jesus: Corrupt Conscience"	Luke 23:9
February 27, 1983	"Sins That Crucified Jesus: Impatience"	John 18:2
March 6, 1983	"Sins That Crucified Jesus: Evasion"	Matthew 27:24
March 9, 1983	"The Face in the Window"	Matthew 27:36
March 13, 1983	"Sins that Crucified Jesus: Fanatical Nationalism"	Matthew 27:16
March 20, 1983	"Counterfeit Religion"	John 11:49
April 3, 1983	"Precious Few"	Acts 10:40-41
April 10, 1983	"Forgiving and Forgetting"	Matthew 18: 23-35
April 17, 1983	"Speaking and Loneliness"	John 16:32
May 1, 1983	"Why Are You Afraid"	Mark 4:40
May 8, 1983	"To Honor Your Father and Mother"	Exodus 20:12
May 22, 1983	"What Does It Means?"	Acts 2:12
May 23, 1983	Meditation	John 1
June 5, 1983	"Man in the Middle"	Book of Philemon
June 12, 1983	"On Being Anxious"	Matthew 6:25-34
June 19, 1983	"The Happy People"	

<u>1983-continued</u>	<u>SERMON TITLE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>
June 26, 1983	"Salt of the Earth"	Matthew 5:13
July 3, 1983	"Declaration of Independence	Psalms 67:1
July 10, 1983	"To Have It Made	Mark 10:17-21
July 17, 1983	"Christian of the Extra Mile"	Luke 10
July 31, 1983	"To God Be Glory"	I Corinth. 10:31
August 7, 1983	"Through the Open Door"	Acts 10:33
August 21, 1983	"What Is A Christian?"	II Corinth. 5:17
September 4, 1983	"Text For A Bishop"	Colossians 1:28
September 25, 1983	"The Use of Wealth"	Luke 12:21
October 2, 1983	Meditation	Matthew 26:20
October 9, 1983	Untitled	John 4:39-38
October 23, 1983	"The Song That Last For A Lifetime"	Psalms 104:33
November 6, 1983	"The Graveyard By The Church"	John 11:26
November 20, 1983	"Reflections On The End of a Church Year"	Galatians 2:20
November 27, 1983	"He Came: To A Certain Place"	Matthew 2:1-2
Dec. 4, 1983	"He Came: To A Certain Time"	Matthew 2:1-2
Dec. 11, 1983	"He Came: To A Certain People"	Matthew 2:1-2
Dec. 18, 1983	"He Came: A Certain Purpose"	Matthew 2:1-2
Dec. 24, 1983	"The Impulse Which Is Christmas"	Revelation 21:5
Dec. 31, 1983	"All Things New"	Luke 2:15

(Prepared by Sheila Fisher (2/1/2012)

"HERE AND NOW"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

John 3:2

Let me tell you quite incidentally as I stand at the sacred desk, something of the mind and the mood that possesses the preacher today. I should like to stand among you in a very relaxed way, picturing as best you can the possibility that you and I could be in a room, just the two of us, in a face-to-face encounter - - and then there would be a free and frank exchange between us, the kind of thing that I did several weeks ago at Bethany when I was there from nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the late afternoon, just talking with anyone who might come by with a concern for things spiritual.

I've not always been as relaxed, perhaps, as I am right now. I remember when I had the good fortune to read the Lessons in the Washington Cathedral, where I was escorted to the sacred desk by a Verger, with a great deal of aplomb, who stationed me there - - I was frightened.....or I remember how, on that last trip to India, when I stood at the sacred desk in a church 300 years old, where giants before me had been - - a very humbling thing.

But this morning, in as relaxed way as possible, bear with me now as I think with you of something that you and I cannot afford to ignore.

The title of the sermon is "HERE AND NOW" - and the text -- always the text, of course -- the second verse of the third chapter of the First General Epistle of the man named John:

"Here and now, dear friends, we are
the children of God."

Now in the light of everything that's to be said in the next eighteen minutes, let that text remain in the background.

Now, you and I are seated in front of each other, and I'm going to begin by asking you a question, a very simple question: How do you account for it?

...that's the question.

In a certain sense, as anyone here this morning over forty or perhaps fifty may be able to say -- all other things being equal, now, this is a generalization:
We have never had it so good.

We are living longer, and healthier....

We are better fed, we are better clothed, we are better housed....

And yet we are running, as a people, either dissatisfied or discouraged. And what is more, I am inclined to think as you and I talk one-to-one, there is a tired anxious feeling about contemporary man, that's it. How do you account for it? Who can gainsay this, once you begin to sit down quietly and calmly and assess the human scene, and conclude -- all other things to the contrary, now, let's keep a sense of balance -- we simply never have had it so good.

Now, do not for a moment think that I am blind to the economic factor, nor for a moment allow yourself to think that I am insensitive to the unemployment figures. I suppose it would take a great deal more courage than I have now to speak in a church, or at a rally, in the county seat there in Ohio, where so very recently a young couple saw their farm go down the drain because they had hanging over them a \$400,000 mortgage, and they had to go bankrupt....or perhaps if I were invited to preach in one of our Lutheran churches in Detroit, where there is that high rate of unemployment -- it might take a bit more courage than I have now...

....and yet I try to balance what I would say by remembering that statistics have been given to us that Detroit had the highest wage rate of some \$20 - \$24 an hour, of any place in the United States of America....

When I make this generalization, How do you account for it: We've never had it so good, and yet we're discouraged and dissatisfied? -- you must keep in mind that the person who is standing in front of you is the son of an immigrant pedlar, who came to these shores from Beirut, penniless....and the first \$200 that he earned he sent back home to repay those who had guaranteed his passage on that steamer that took three weeks to come to our shores . . . a pedlar who had two suitcases, balanced on either side by that leather strap across his shoulders as he walked (because he didn't have money to pay for public conveyance) from one town to another, and perchance might have a good day if he sold five packages of shoe-laces -- had a very, very good day if he sold one hand-made Irish linen table-cloth . . . and when he had a very bad day, with no receipts in his pocket, too embarrassed to ask the farm-wife if he might stay for nothing at her house, he'd seek out the constable in the town and ask for the privilege of sleeping in the flea-bed in the town jail. This is the one who is speaking to you now -- the son of an immigrant pedlar, who arrived on these shores penniless.

Let's keep it all in balance, please. All other things considered, have we ever had it so good? And yet we are a people who are anxious and discouraged. A writer 40 years ago said, "We have a tired world on our hands, a world that back in 1914 hopefully lost its illusions, but now has lost its illusions about losing them -- we've seen through everything . . .

- we've seen through our parents
- we've seen through education
- we've seen through our morality
- we've seen through the social order

...and we don't know what to examine next. So having forgotten our aim, we begin to redouble our efforts -- we have discovered that the absence of belief is a vacuum, and that there is no freedom to be had in mere freedom. There is a growing conviction abroad that everything is futile, including futility. We give up on religion, we give up on society, we give up on man himself. And after a while the very act of giving things up nauseates one. It is pretty awful...."

A few years ago a learned observer of the human scene maintained -- and I can readily appreciate this, as I look back from my vantage-point of 42 years of standing at the sacred desk -- how when the preacher comes to face the congregation, the mood can change from one generation to another. An historian says 75 years ago when the average Christian congregation came together, the dominating mood was a sense of guilt -- when people came to church acknowledging themselves as sinners and were crying out for pardon!

I look back. Was it a decade-and-a-half ago -- how long ago was it, when the front cover on TIME magazine, in black bold letters: "GOD IS DEAD."and any number of people came, even crossing the threshold of a sacred place such as this, came with doubts in their mind: Is there really such a thing as God? Does He exist?

...and a sweet one whom I had the good fortune to confirm in the Christian faith, went off to college during that whole period, and I remember a letter that she wrote, that I still keep -- she was caught up with it....she began to reject what we represent and what we taught her . . . and in the letter that she wrote me: "Please, Pastor, don't write me any more, and don't send me any more things from Saint Luke Church. I don't need it."

Prayerfully I replied to her letter, in which I simply said -- and maybe you'd like to know what I told her: "I have been giving my life to the kind of thing that you

now see fit to reject. Tell me honestly, will you -- the next time you come home, come to see me. If you've found out something that I don't know, tell me! I don't want to waste the rest of my life dealing with something that has no value for the human scene."

They tell me now, and I have moments when I think I can understand it, that when many a congregation gathers in 1980 for worship, the dominating mood is one of discouragement, and of futility. If you want me to justify that, well, let's look at it, let's take an example of Social Security as an example --

- there have never been larger checks mailed out to recipients, and never have checks been made out to a greater number of people....and yet any one, no matter how remotely related to the problem before us, seems to be anything else but discouraged -- sure, we're waiting with bated breath for the report that may come out tomorrow! But what assurance do we have?....what assurance do we have? . . . and that leads to a measure of discouragement.

Another example:

- never have we lived longer, and never have we been healthier ...and yet the prospect of death by cancer is greater than ever before....
- the prospect of violent death at the hands of a criminal who can stalk us by night or by day is not diminishing....

We've never lived longer, we've never been healthier...and yet there remains this prospect of death by cancer, and death -- violent death, at the hands of a stranger.

- we've never had more cars on the road...and by the same token we now speak in terms of slaughter on the highway....

Seemingly, this is one and the same time, the best of times and the worst of times. As you and I are in front of each other you'll have to excuse me if I get carried away every now and then.

They tell me that the person who is a recipient of government pension, and he retired ten years ago, his pension now is greater than his salary check was a decade ago. In a certain sense it can be said -- this has never happened before. How it may be with you -- could this be said? -- we've never lived in finer homes, with more expensive possessions. But we can never really be happy. We're discouraged by the fact that we must fortify ourselves with bars and

chains and bolts and locks, and mechanical electronic devices of many a description - - why even in Saint Luke Church, morning, afternoon and evening, we are in duty bound to maintain a security cadre! Say it again and again - - all other things being equal, it could be maintained that we've never had it so good, and yet we are dissatisfied, we are discouraged.

And one more statistic, if you don't mind. I won't give it to you in factual figures - - but have we ever had more billions in savings accounts?...and money market funds?...in certificates of deposit? And yet in the face of mitigating circumstances, we're not as secure as we could be as we think of an unfolding future. How do you account for it? Good question, really. The net result is that we live in an age that is more prone to anxiety than any, perhaps, the world has ever known.

I can say that to you on good authority. We have only to think in terms of more serious plays that have been written, the more searching of our novels -- they're all about this! And even the pot-boilers, as one person said among them, display their awareness of it, when they are not resolutely supplying an escape from it, accept their estimate of the situation. And the conclusion you may arrive at is this: that to have an anxiety neurosis is simply in these days to be normal.

But as you and I sit and talk with each other, it's not enough that I should raise the question for you. I try never to forget that I am a man of God. My life is given to the Scriptures, my life is given to bringing to bear the eternal dimension. An attempt must be made to answer our question: How account for the apparent sterility of our days? We are a people in a land of plenty, but we are a people of impoverished spirits. How about trying this one for size - - could it be that we have hopelessly thrown our energies into organizing life for income? - - that terrible thing that used to be said: get a college education because it will guarantee you a greater income before you die. Could it be that we have hopelessly thrown our energies into organizing life for income, and organizing life for security? . . . and the whole effort wears us out! We're tired. We're not satisfied. And we can go to bed and wake up the next morning discouraged. Why? - - We concentrate on the present at the expense of the future. We think primarily of today, and we lose sight of forever.

Throughout my ministry - - everyone needs a giant. The giant for me has been the prince-of-the-pulpit of a number of years ago, Dr. Paul Scherer, who for more than a quarter-of-a-century shepherded the people of Holy Trinity Luth-

eran Church, Central Park West at 65th Street in New York. I'm leaning on him heavily at this point, and I'm going to quote what he said:

" . . . There seem to be long ages in history when men allow themselves to be dominated by their concept of God, the soul, and the Great Beyond. And then there are other ages when they allow themselves to be controlled by their present experience of phenomena, of things tangible and things practical. And as they grow to believe these things become real. At the close of such an age, (Syroken) , the Russian sociologist and philosopher with his four mighty values on the cultural dynamics, says our civilization is stuffed with furniture and gadgets and comforts, and sick of it --- full of science and technique, with nothing to show for it but increasing unhappiness. Its own worst enemy, threatening itself with disaster every Monday, Wednesday and Friday...big and prosperous and swollen and ready to disgorge everything that it swallowed with such eagerness . . . "

...and hear me well now as the conclusion inevitably has to be drawn . . .

" . . . simply because it has tried to live its life without any eternal reference. (Syroken) is right, he's quite right. Life has been meant for the eternal dimension . . . no question about it . . . "

When will we ever learn from that old man John, who surveying the human scene in his day, quietly and calmly said to those to whom he wrote: "Look at it this way -- We are children of God -- now -- today! We don't have a set abiding place! Heaven is our destination! There is more that is yet to come! This life now is not everything!" . . . and I would add just as quickly and just as earnestly -- by concentrating on what you have in front of you, you do it at great peril when you ignore the eternal dimension. Whatever you have, my friend, can be taken away -- your possessions, your health, your loved ones. Whatever is in front of you now, you have no guarantee it could be there tomorrow.

In the parish where I began my ministry -- his name was Howard C. Hill, he lived at 700 Campbell Street in the Valemont section of Williamsport. For one night after another he went to bed a millionaire...and then the crash came, and in his own words he told me, he woke up the next morning a pauper! It ill behooves any man to concentrate simply on what is in front of him, and ignore the fact that there is the eternal dimension. It is the only dimension on earth that can give the life any perspective. And you can't snub it forever. Said Paul Scherer, "You can have your fling for a while, fooling around down here with two

dimensions, concerned about the length of your years on this safer bit of a planet in the sky, all excited about your wits, how much ground you cover, with all your bridges and your corporations and your fancy possessions, you may disdain all interest in the depth of life -- that background which is forever. But the outcome of all your bother is a kind of inevitable flatness -- you just cannot squeeze reality into the span between two dates on a tombstone. Whenever a man or a century begins to do this, something begins to snap."

...it is the Christian Gospel, I tell you, that gives our lives their setting. Nothing else!

Stand yourself up against eternity, measure your ways against it, your hopes and your fears." The only thing that brings some of us sanity is the belief and the trust that after today there will be tomorrow. Any man who ignores the eternal dimension does so at great peril. And that's why some of us are taking today a bit more seriously than ever before, to make up for the time that we lost -- yesterday -- last year.

In a certain sense, with eternity at stake, we really don't have a minute to lose. This I most certainly believe. . .

"Beloved -- here -- now, we're children of
God. . . ."

...and when you mention God, you deal with the eternal.

* * *

(this sermon transcribed as
recorded)

January 23, 1983

"WHEN DISAPPOINTMENT COMES"
(Romans 1:13)

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God
our Father and from His Son, Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There are two things that need to be said before we launch fully into the preaching of today's sermon:

1) I'd like to tell you about my friend, Jay McCoy. I knew his friendship in the community where we lived before we came to you here in Silver Spring.

Jay was a very unusual person, I dare say a rare spirit. He became a convert to the Christian faith -- he gave his life to the Lord, under the influence of Billy Sunday. Now Billy Sunday did in his day what Billy Graham is doing in our day.

...Jay had his own peculiar relationship with the Lord, as will be evidenced by what you are about to hear.

Once Winifred and I were guests in their home on Louisa Street in Williamsport, and before we even sat down to eat the meal, as we gathered around the table and were standing by our chairs, Jay cocked his head Heavenward, as much as to say, "Now, Good Lord, I want to talk to you for a minute . . ."
...and he began in this manner:

"Dear Heavenly Father, we are gathered here now, we are glad we can be together. We've had a not-so-good day, but don't get me wrong, we're not complaining, we're not going to blame you. The table is spread with the food -- Julia, she's my wife, you know that, Lord -- she's been in the kitchen....and now we're going to eat. We've got plenty. But there are a lot of people who don't have anything. But before we eat a single bite, Good Lord, we'd just like to say thank you, and I'm going to say it in behalf of these other people who are here . . ."

...and then he pulled out a chair and sat down -- he didn't even say "Amen."
Jay was that kind of a person.

Why do I tell you this? -- Say it again and ever so often -- he had this very warm personal relationship with the Lord. It might not be your cup of tea, you might not care to fraternize as easily with the Lord, and I don't encourage it generally. But you need to have understood Jay. Again, let it be said, he had this warm personal relationship with the Lord and there is no question about the trust that he had in the Lord ever since he gave his life to the Lord.

Now Jay was a printer. He never made much money, he never cared too much about the making of money, but he did cast his eye longingly across the street, about a half-a-block up, on a piece of property which one day he hoped to be able to own. He rented space for his print shop there on the corner of Third and Penn Streets. Finally he scraped together enough money to buy the land, and then a lifetime dream was coming true: he built his own print shop.

...the day came when they gathered all the equipment together and they moved -- and then the next day the presses would run. What music it would be to his ears, in his very own print shop, the dream of a lifetime....

His son Harry stood alongside of him as he turned the key for the night when the moving had been completed, to go home, eat a good meal, go to bed. . . . Jay died in his sleep. He never was able to return and to see that print shop operate even for one day.

....what a disappointment to his family, what a disappointment to his friends. But Jay, being the kind of a person that he was, I presume that as soon as he got a glimpse of the Good Lord in Heaven, that he probably said, "You pulled a fast one on me!"

Now the second thing that needs to be said is this:

-- if you should be here this morning, and your marriage is 110% successful . . .

-- if you should be here this morning, and life has turned out for you absolutely wonderfully well.....if you've gotten everything that you ever hoped for and dreamed of.....

-- if your youngsters have turned out the way every youngster ought to turn out as far as the dream of his parents is concerned.....

-- if you've never experienced a single disappointment . . .

-- please go home!

You'll never hear a word of what I'm going to say in this sermon this morning. If you've never experienced disappointment you can't possibly appreciate what's going

to be said. For this sermon, prepared for delivery today from the Saint Luke pulpit, bears the title: "WHEN DISAPPOINTMENT COMES." The words for the title carefully chosen - - not "IF" disappointment should come - - I've lived long enough to be able to go on the assumption, without any hesitation, without any reluctance, that eventually the disappointment becomes the lot of every one of us. I can honestly say I have never met anyone who could tell me that he's never had a disappointment. And the text: words written by a man named Paul, who could speak authoritatively, for as you read any number of the writings that came from his mind and spirit, you'll find him referring to one disappointment after another. And in the letter that he wrote to Christians who lived in the imperial city of Rome, he no sooner began the letter than he could tell them the words that constitute the text for this sermon, the 13th verse of that first chapter:

"I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you, but thus far I have been prevented."

...and then as he nears the end of that very same letter, he makes quite plain to them all over again - -

"Remember what I told you at the beginning - "

(that's what he's really saying)

" . . I am the person who wanted to come to you, but I have been spending my energies going here and there, round about, preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and particularly in places where the word of Christ had not been proclaimed - - this is a reason why I have been hindered in coming to you -- I want you to know this. I've wanted to come . . . "

He even wanted to go to Spain, which was the end of the world, to all intents and purposes - - the thrill of being able to go there, where all those wonderful people were, to have the satisfaction of believing and saying, "I took them Jesus Christ" - - - that's a noble ambition, to say the least.

We have reason to believe that he never got to Spain. And when he did get to Rome, what happened? He was thrown in a prison cell! Talk about disappointment. It comes. And it comes even to the giants.

I need to say this to you, and you need to hear it. When I first became your Pastor I wanted to learn about my predecessors. I am committed to the fact that no one is able to build unless he builds on the shoulders of those who have been before him. What were they like?

They told me about each one of them. I bowed my head in a tremendous measure of respect when they mentioned the name of the Rev. Dr. Raymond Sorrick, the second

Pastor of this congregation. He was the one who placed before this congregation the dream of the very walls that surround you. For four-and-a-half years they met in borrowed places, and then when he became the Pastor -- "We'll build . . we will build . . . we can build!" And he met with one building committee after another. He helped to turn the first spade-ful of earth for the very building in which you find yourself right now. And I have been given to understand -- he was the one who kept before the building committee that there should be a Rose Window

...and whenever I walk this sacred aisle and I find myself looking upward, I think of that beautiful Rose Window that reminds us of Heaven . . . and Dr. Raymond Sorrick.

Why do I tell you this?

He never stepped foot inside this building. He was never given the chance to stand where I now stand. He could never grace the altar with folded hands in prayer. They brought him from Suburban Hospital in the ambulance, I am told, loving hands braced him so he could look out the window and see this church going up brick by brick. . . . they took him down here to 425 Greenbrier, the parsonage at that time, to die of cancer. Disappointment?

- think what it meant to his family.....
- think what it probably meant to him.....
- think what it meant to the members of this congregation, young and struggling -- a dream within grasp, and then their shepherd to be taken away!

I give this to you on good authority, my friend -- you turn one page of the Scriptures after another, and you're dealing with one person after another who encountered disappointment! -- it never turned out the way the great ones would have liked it to have turned out. Talk about all the others --

Moses, as an example.....forty years wandering around in the wilderness with that obstinate, stubborn group of people -- all the flak that he had to take from them, how they would have traded him ever and again for somebody else. But he had this marvelous dream -- one day, the Promised Land would be theirs! How does it end for Moses? -- Jehovah God: "Moses -- there it is! Look at it! Take a good look, Moses. You're not going to step foot on that ground."

....talk about a disappointment!

David, the great King the dream of building the Temple - -

"No, David . . . no, David. You won't do it. Solomon will.

-- but not you, David!"

.....when disappointment comes.....

You have a perfect right to let it come as close to you as another member of this congregation. She and her husband and children were members when I first became your Pastor. He served in the Military. If I remember correctly, they had four growing youngsters. He boarded a plane at National Airport on a Sunday night after he had been here at worship in the morning. An unexpected electrical storm, and he crashed to his death.

...She wrote me a letter weeks later.

"Pastor, we had reached a point where we could almost grasp the stars!

We thought we had it made - - and then that night. . . "

When disappointment came to her, how do you suppose she handled it the wrong way? I shan't fault her . . . she said,

"I went back and I re-traced those precious moments in our lives.

I went back and stayed overnight at the place where he proposed to

me...I went back and stayed overnight at the place where we were

married.....I went back to the place where our first child was

baptized . . . "

And then fortunately it dawned on her - - that you don't face disappointment by torturing yourself by going back and living in that time when it was like a prelude for a disappointment -- that's what it was. But what did she do? She dealt with it creatively. And that's what you and I must remember when disappointment comes.

It isn't so much what disappointment may do to us. It's how we handle the disappointment when it occurs. A physician friend of mine maintains that the secret of life is not achievement as it is adjustment. Tolstoy gives us four different ways by which a person can deal with disappointment:

- 1) - - you commit suicide. You've had it, and you have no desire to face another day. That's a wrong way.

Tolstoy, if I remember correctly, says there is another way:

- 2) - - you run away from it . . . and you become ostrich-like and pretend it never happened. You spend all of your energy trying to ignore it. That's the wrong way.

Another way, said Tolstoy:

- 3) - - you face it stoically, you endure it. We have a member of our staff

who facetiously says at times: "I'm perfectly willing to suffer in silence as long as everybody notices . . ."

And sometimes when you have to experience a disappointment you endure it, and everybody else pays a price because you're suffering. And that's a negative way.

The creative way is: 4) - - to come to grips with it, and to make something of it.
...as some wit observed, " -- to make tracks out of the traction."
That's what she did.

I still have her in mind. She did something that surprised me, as she tried to deal creatively with disappointment. For some reason she has yet to explain to me, but thinking in terms of writing a brand new chapter, she changed her first name....
...and continuing to deal with it creatively -- would you believe it -- she went off to Divinity School, went up to Harvard, got her degree . . . and is now an ordained minister of the Lutheran Church in America, shepherding a congregation in Pennsylvania -- that desperately needed the kind of thing that she could bring. When disappointment comes, learn to deal with it creatively.

Some years back, a number of years ago, of course, in Decatur, Illinois, there was a youngster, God bless him -- when a quarter was a quarter -- it was like a fortune to him. It was his very own quarter. He answered an ad in the newspaper. He sent his quarter in and in exchange he had hoped to receive a book about photography -- he wanted to be a photographer, that was his dream.

The publishers made a mistake, and they sent him a book on ventriloquism.

His quarter had gone. He didn't have any money to send the book back and ask for something else in return. But what did he do? - - he mastered the art, on the basis of the book that had been sent him....and he became Edgar Bergen, the great ventriloquist of his time! -- and perhaps of all time! You learn to deal with it creatively.

And you learn to deal with it honestly. You won't like me to tell you this, but sometimes when we encounter disappointment it's because we've set ourselves up for it. We crave a position, we desire an advancement -- for which we are totally unprepared. And if we were put in that position we couldn't possibly pull it off for any length of time. But we allow ourselves to believe it! And we have to be very honest with ourselves, sometimes it could happen that way, that we wittingly or unwittingly set ourselves up for the disappointment that's sure to come...and then we have to be equally honest with God. We can't presume to know all that God knows, and we can't allow ourselves to believe that God can't function unless He functions with me and by me, and according to my agenda.

God had His own reasons why Joshua should be His man in the Promised Land and take the troops in. It is a salutary thing, honestly it is, and don't you think I haven't learned this the hard way - - it's a salutary thing to learn that God can use other people besides us in order to have His purpose accomplished.

Now getting back to this man Apostle Paul - - you read that letter to the Romans, and get caught up with the fact that he said: "This has been my intention, this is what I'd like to have done, but couldn't do it." - - does he throw the sponge in, does he call it quits? What does he do? He finds God's purpose for his life being fulfilled in the task at hand that needed to be done. It wasn't very glamorous - - what he had to do was to take the money that people had collected to give to the poor in Jerusalem . . .

-- not to preach a sermon not to get 5,000 converts
...but just to deliver the collection!

In the face of the disappointment, Paul responded creatively, earnestly, and allowed himself to believe that God's purpose for his life could still be fulfilled by trekking up to Jerusalem carrying the collection.

My friend Jay McCoy lived his life with fervent devotion and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe this is where you and I need to stop ever so often - -

. . . Dear God, it's not the way I would
have planned it. I had another agenda,
but maybe some day I'll recognize the
validity of what you had in mind . . .

. . . this I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HARNESSING INTERRUPTIONS"
(Col. 4:5)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Not all sermons are begun in the same way. Let me take a minute or two to tell you how this one happened to have been initiated when the seed was sown.

I find myself one of the first to be here on a Sunday morning. I thoroughly anticipate the privilege of being quiet as I find myself in my study, just a few feet away from where I am standing. Like as not on a wintry morn, when there is still darkness on the outside, I may light a candle in my study and just sit there and reflect and meditate. I've discovered that I need this sort of thing before the day formally begins, and particularly before the first sermon is preached from this pulpit. I crave the quiet.

But then occasionally there's a tap on the door, and who should enter but the ebullient Assistant Pastor of the parish, the Rev. David Matthew Buchenroth. He comes in with a smile as broad as his face, sits down, and says, "Good morning, Pastor. How are you? What can I do for you today?" - - a very happy way by which to greet a person. But - - - shall I tell you - - it's an interruption. And like as not when Pastor Buchenroth sits there and we talk, he may tell me a bit about his week, how it's come and gone, and some of the things that he's eager to do today and tomorrow.

I recall so well how on one of those times he said, "Pastor, out of your experience, tell me -- how do you handle interruptions? . . . with his zeal to get all of his work done, bless his soul, he's frustrated by the things that get in the way, that side-track him.

Now I'm very grateful that he comes to me, and I'm very grateful that he looks upon me as a mentor, because maybe that's one reason why God has allowed me forty-two years in the ministry. He once told me he looks upon me as a grandfather! - - (I'd have been happy if he would have said as a father)...but then it occurred to me that I could have said to him, "David, talk about interruptions -- let's talk about them" . . . and I wouldn't add this, "You're an interruption right now" . . . of course I wouldn't say that to him.

But I did go on to say that interruptions give us an opportunity to deal with things that otherwise we might not have been given that chance. And I think I did tell him about the old priest, when the young priest came to him, and was David Matthew Buchenroth all over again -- and said to the old priest, "These interruptions! -- these interruptions! -- they get in my way"...and the old priest said, "I used to say that, too, until I discovered that my interruptions became my work." Now that's the point you need to keep in mind, for I have discovered that I too have been annoyed by times of interruption, until I learned in a very salutary manner to recognize the fact that the interruptions are still a part of our work.

Now the title for this sermon is "Harnessing Interruptions" and the text, it's the fifth verse of the 4th chapter of a letter that was written by a man named Paul to some Christians who lived in a place called Colössae. I grant you, I must be very honest with you -- I'm taking a bit out of context because I have no reason to believe that when Paul was writing to those Christians in that city, that he had in mind giving them advice and counsel as to how to harness their interruptions....but the truth implicit in the text speaks to your need and my need as we deal with the fact of interruptions. Said the Apostle Paul,

"Make the best possible use of your time."

Now I hasten to tell you that you do Jesus Christ a disservice if you ever allow yourself to think that He just wandered around aimlessly from place to place, as though He didn't know in what direction He wanted to go next. As I read the Gospel record as though I had never read it before, and I try to do this periodically -- read it as though I were reading it for the very first time....and as I go from the first chapter to the last chapter of Matthew, Mark, Luke or John, I am tremendously impressed that Jesus Christ was a man with a schedule -- Jesus Christ was a man who disciplined His day -- He knew where He wanted to go, and He knew how He wanted to get there, and He knew what He wanted to do, step by step of His journey through life. So you do yourself, and you do Jesus Christ a disservice if you ever allow yourself to think that He was a man without a schedule, or a person without an agenda. Go back and read for yourself that great 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, where Jesus Christ, going back to His home town, went to the synagogue and in no uncertain manner allowed them to know that He was a man with an agenda -- "This is what I am going to do with My life, and I'm going to begin in your presence, and it's happening now -- today ---- here, and in this place."

From the time that He spoke...or if you want to go back earlier, to the time when He was twelve years of age, when He said to His troubled parents who were looking for Him as a lost teenager, one almost a teenager - "Why, didn't you know, I must be about my Father's business" . . . to the very end, in the Garden of Gethsemane, with that terrible interruption - - "Not my will, but Thine be done"....He knew exactly what He was meant to do, who He was, how it was to be done. But at the same time, I must tell you this, as I read that same Gospel record, dealing with the-man-with-an-agenda - - He was constantly being interrupted.....side-tracked....asking Him to give attention to this person and to that thing - - all along the way.

Who heard the announcement made at the lectern, that one week from this Wednesday is the first day in Lent. Seldom do I approach the Lenten season in recent years without refreshing my mind of the original Lenten pilgrimage, if I may put it that way, the journey to Jerusalem. Here again you can read it for yourself in the 18th and 19th chapters of the Gospel according to Luke, in the concluding section of the 18th chapter. Jesus has His disciples by His side.....then He gives them the final chapters of the agenda, namely: the Jerusalem finale, and He tells them exactly what's going to happen, where He's going, what wi'l take place. . . . and then as much as to say, "Well, let's get on the road!" And to get to Jerusalem they had to go through Jericho, and as they were coming near Jericho - - now get this - - someone who had just laid out the agenda, someone who had just announced the schedule, and someone who steadfastly said, "Let's go to Jerusalem" - - He doesn't even get inside Jericho until He's side-tracked . . . the blind beggar Bartimaeus by name, who cries out and says, "Jesus, son of David, have mercy on me -- pay attention to me! - - no matter what's on your mind, Jcsus, give me a bit of your time!"

...and he boldly interrupts Jesus Christ. And Jesus pays him the attention that he required. It's an interruption, but a miracle is performed.....

You move on into the 19th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, and as Jesus is going through Jericho there's another interruption . . . He has Jerusalem on His mind undoubtedly, but as He's walking along He looks up into a tree and He sees a man named Zacchaeus, that little bit of a fellow who was in deep trouble with the rest of the people in the community. It's an interruption...

....and Jesus says, "Come on down, Zacchaeus, I'm going to go to your house and we're going to have supper together and you and I are going to talk!"

Whatever else has been planned for this day has been put on the back burner -- it's an interruption. You can't possibly think of the life of Jesus Christ without thinking of Him as a disciplined person whose life was constantly being interrupted.

Now, how much more do I have to impress upon you the fact that we are constantly being interrupted. Somebody observing the human scene said that of all people we are the most interrupted people in all mankind. We're constantly being interrupted.

I think sometimes -- let me say it -- we bring it on ourselves. Do you see, we not only have one telephone, but we get an extension, upstairs or downstairs -- and what's that doing but that's inviting interruptions!

...not only that, thanks to the electronic marvel in the telephone business, you have the cordless telephone now, ...so you're out in the yard, you're by the pool, you're on the porch . . . what are you doing when you have that within reach but inviting an interruption?

Some of us like to order our day and stick pretty much to the schedule, because that's the way we think we can get things done most effectively. I think after all these years Winifred's beginning to understand why I don't do yard work around the parsonage at 919 Highland Drive ---- I'll tell you why. As soon as I get in my old clothes and get out there to weed or to prune, one interruption after another . . . I'm still the Pastor of the church while I'm up there weeding....or there's a call on the telephone. Now up in the country, in our little place in Pennsylvania, it's different. We don't have a telephone....

....one interruption after another, and you've had them.

Now, what about it? What is the Christian perspective when it comes to harnessing interruptions? How do you respond?

Oh, I have to say quite parenthetically to you, some interruptions we welcome. Winifred's father was like that. He was one of the Heim boys who didn't stay in the big city, didn't go off to the university, but felt constrained to take care of the farm. But he loved people, and would you believe it, he welcomed every time he'd see the McNess salesman, or the Larkin salesman driving up the lane, because it meant an interruption, he could come in from the field and just talk with that person.

In the parish that I served before I came to you we had a man who worked for the Jewel Tea Company . . . with his little truck he'd go around from house

to house. And I once said to him, "How much do you get for a bottle of vanilla?" And I was amazed at the price that he gave me, because it was considerably more than what you could buy it at the corner grocery or the supermarket. I said, "How do you get away with this sort of thing?" And he surprised me by his answer....(this was the day when the greater part of housewives stayed home and were not working mothers)....and he said to me, "Pastor, do you realize, the average American housewife is lonely, and she welcomes the knock at the door, even though it's a salesman."

....and I can believe that -- my mother was like that, she bought any number of things that she didn't need, just out of a courtesy to the man who knocked on her door.

But these interruptions, you see, that we don't welcome, the interruptions that constitute an irritant, and an annoyance -- how deal with them? Let me suggest a thing or two....

First, I honestly believe that that person is fortunate who can allow a margin of time as he plans his work -- a margin of time for the interruptions that are sure to come. And interruptions are a fact of life.

...I learned that lesson a number of years ago when it became very plain to me that my sermon for the upcoming Sunday should be finished by Thursday night in order that I might make an allowance for the demands on my time that could come Friday and Saturday....

Oh, don't get me wrong, I still like to be quiet on a Saturday night and draw it all together and sit back and reflect and make myself available to the Holy Spirit, so that when I stand at this sacred desk there should be no question about it, that it's God channeling His Word to you through the person who happens to stand here. It doesn't mean that I would lack preparation -- I don't want to be like the preacher who stood up on a Sunday morning and confided to his congregation that he had one interruption after another, and he was unable to preach the sermon, so he'd have to depend completely upon the Holy Spirit, but he said, "I promise you it will be better next Sunday." So to handle these interruptions, if at all possible you provide for a margin that can handle them.

The second thing, and far more important than anything else that I can say to you, is this: as a child of God each of us must see himself as a servant of God who is meant to witness for God in the face of any condition or circumstance, whether it's an interruption or not. Now that's something that you and I need to work at, to remind ourselves that even these interruptions become an opportunity for us.

You look back sometime and think of the interruptions that came to you, and if you were sensitive enough to be able to take advantage of them! Happy indeed is that mother - - honestly, and I say it advisedly, who when her routine is interrupted by a child who asks a troublesome question, who has enough time and energy to sit down with that youngster and just try to bring to bear God's point of view on that question that troubles that youngster's mind. And by the way, think how often your mother or your father demonstrated a parent's love and concern for you when you interrupted their schedule by your ache and your pain and your hurt. You were an interruption. It wasn't on their schedule, and your hurt, your accident, wasn't on your schedule either. But in and through that experience you still remember how they were nothing less than love and concern, as they took advantage of the interruption to prove it.

I can't possibly walk away from this sacred desk without telling you in no uncertain manner that you and I are constantly interrupting God. God has His agenda for your life as He has an agenda for my life. God has scheduled certain things for me in my growth and my development. He made me to respond to Him, He meant me for Heaven. And every now and then I interrupt Him in His process.

...what is my sinning - - what is your sinning --- but an interruption to God? And yet God in His mercy seizes in that interruption to come to us in our sinful state and put His arm around us, figuratively, and to say,

"You have been errant, and you've strayed, and
you have been wicked! But I love you."

When did it ever sound more precious to us? We're interrupting Him constantly, but He takes advantage of those interruptions to be every bit the God that He's meant to be, and is.....

....and by that same token, you and I
in the face of the interruptions that come to us, we're meant to
be never less than a good witness for Jesus Christ.

This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

"A GOOD QUESTION"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Feb 10:25

Tell me now, which do you think is better: to be able to give the easy answer? - - or would you rather be the person who asks the hard question? Someone has observed that a real sign of maturation is when you pass from the first stage in your life to the third stage; and the first stage is: when you concern yourself primarily with asking questions. The second stage is when you realize the importance of coming up with the right answers. And the third sign, of maturation, is when you know what the real question is that ought to be asked. The lamentable thing about life as I see it is that there are any number of people who have never learned to ask the right questions.

I have become uncomfortable, I tell you quite frankly, sometimes, when I hear people bandying about the slogan: CHRIST IS THE ANSWER. Of course I believe He's the answer! But my greater concern lies in the fact that there are any number of people who have yet to ask the questions that only Jesus Christ can answer. It's not enough to tell people that He's the answer, unless they first begin to deal with the questions that need to be answered.

I have a high regard for Billy Graham, don't mis-understand me, but sometimes I'm also troubled when I hear him say: "The Bible says - - " . . . "The Bible says - - " . . . "The Bible says - - " --- and you know the high regard that I have for the Scriptures. But if in that repetition he's giving us to believe that the Bible has a pat answer for any question, we could be misled.

There was once a member of this congregation who transferred his membership to another parish, because quite honestly he told me that he didn't appreciate my preaching, because when he came to church what he wanted more than anything else was to give him a blue-print, precise answers, for every matter with which he'd have to deal. I'm sorry that I disappointed him.

Now having said all of that, let me tell you the title for today's sermon: "A GOOD QUESTION" - - and I'll tell you what prompts it, as I read for you now a passage of Scripture from the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke that was assigned to us some 45 years ago, when as a student in the Divinity School

the professor said, "Now, you read this passage of Scripture and you come back the next time we meet and raise all the questions that you can regarding that passage of Scripture, and hopefully share with the class a perspective that you think, up to this time, has been seldom considered in this specific passage." Well, here's the passage -- you'll recognize it. It's one of the most familiar stories that Jesus ever told:

"And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"

He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou?"

And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.

And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.

But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?"

And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise."

Now some of us pondered that passage of Scripture, as the professor had asked us to do. And when we next met, here was the question that I introduced:

-- Jesus Christ makes it perfectly clear as to what ought to be done once a person has been victimized. But what would Jesus Christ have us to do if we came upon the scene when the attacker was at work?

God question, really.

Where were you on January 25, 1983, at 12:20, shortly after noon? You may say to me, that's a personal question, you have no right to ask me. Well suppose I don't ask you, but I'll give you the privilege of asking me where I was on January 25, 1983 at 12:20

...I had just finished devotions in the Chapel of The Grateful Heart, had gone to the church office and was walking to the parsonage at 919 Highland Drive, when much to my consternation I discovered on Highland Drive, between the parsonage and the house next door, a fire truck and two police squad cars. Winifred and our Buildings and Grounds Superintendent were engaged in conversation with troubled looks upon their faces....

I soon discovered the reason why. . . 12:20, now -- mid-day, an intruder had forced his way into the home of our neighbor. He had bruised Ellen Johnson up pretty badly -- she's the mother of five children. He insisted that she give over whatever available cash she had, and then he forced her to give him her keys, primarily the key to the Volvo, the new Volvo in the driveway, by which he made his getaway after he had ripped out the telephones....

My blood began to boil as soon as I heard what had happened. I was infuriated to believe that this thing does take place. As you might know, my first thought was that it could have been my Winifred. A few years back I wrote in one of my journals that in the city of New York a mugging takes place every five minutes! That means by the time this sermon is finished, as far as New York is concerned, if you want to stick with that city, at least four different people have been brutalized....and who knows to what extent. A statistic is only a statistic, you see, until you happen to become the statistic, until it becomes your neighbor, your wife.

I am thinking right now as I stand at the sacred desk of four different members of this parish whom I know...

-- one of whom is present right now, within perhaps 25 steps of where I am standing -- mugged on Capital Hill...

-- the man who will be giving out the bulletins at 11:00 o'clock, at about 2:30 in the afternoon, behind the Silver Spring library, was mugged....

-- one of our members as he got off the bus at Alaska Avenue,

just nearby Silver Spring -- mugged.....

So we could go on and on and on. It does happen. And increasingly so. No question as far as Jesus is concerned as to what to do, once you arrive on the scene after the attack has been made. But what's a Christian to do -- if he were to arrive when the whole thing is taking place?

I wish I could answer it for you. I am not sure that I can, specifically. I only know that you and I come into other people's lives at different times. Conditions and circumstances change, I do know that we have a way of looming upon the scene, and because we're meant to be disciples of Jesus Christ, we're not meant to ignore what's happening in other people's lives. Christians are meant to relate to other people. The question remains: what should one do?

To the best of my knowledge, I don't know of anyone who has ever dealt with this sermon from this angle. In the preparation of this sermon I checked out 17 different preachers and writers and Biblical scholars who had dealt with this passage, the 10th chapter of Luke, the 25 - 37th verses, and not a single one of them addresses the question. Had the Good Samaritan arrived an hour earlier, a half-hour earlier, what would Jesus Christ have expected him to have done? I still think it's a good question, because you and I, you see, could come upon the attacker.

Here is what's entitled SOUND ADVICE, given officially by the Bureau of Police.

-- if you should happen to walk in on a burglar while he is working, or you have reason to believe that someone may be in your home, you leave immediately. You go to your neighbor's home, if that's possible, or anywhere where you could find a phone to call the police, who are equipped to deal with this sort of thing.....

The bottom line is this, in this official advice: "Do not confront the burglar, or your personal safety will be in danger."

Now I suppose some of us take that very seriously and we welcome that advice, because if there's one victim, we're not about to contribute a second, and so maybe it may be good advice: You keep your distance.

...or there's another bit of advice which I suppose could be basically Christian: You distract as best you can the attacker, so that the violence can be minimized. Happy indeed is that person who might be able to do that, to minimize the violence that's taking place -- distract....minimize....seek help.

I wish I could give you a more specific answer. I also know that above all else

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen

The First Sunday in Lent

February 20, 1983

"SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS: CORRUPT CONSCIENCE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
 Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
 our Blessed Lord. Amen.

This is the passage of Scripture that you need to be hearing right now, for all that's to be said from here on until the sermon is concluded is inspired by and based upon this text -- the 23rd chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, one of the final chapters in the life of our Blessed Lord:

" . . . And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.

And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a king.

And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it.

Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.

And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.

When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean.

And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.

Then he questioned with him in many words;

(now get ready for the way this passage
 concludes -- it ought to jolt you a bit)

Then he questioned with him in many words, but he answered him nothing.

That means Jesus Christ did not say a single word.

That means Jesus Christ deliberately refused to speak to this person.

That means Jesus Christ gave somebody the silent treatment.

That means Jesus Christ gave someone the cold shoulder.

How unlike Jesus Christ! So vastly different from anything that you ever knew about Him.

huh
 23:8-12

Why, even from the very beginning your image of Jesus Christ was this:

- kind, considerate, who went out of His way to pay attention to people
- who even as He was journeying toward Jerusalem, with so much on His mind, took the initiative and called to a man up a tree -- paid attention to him! -- before the man even said anything to Jesus....
- this Jesus who held children in His arm and smiled upon them, this Jesus who even performed a miracle for a woman whose face He did not see, just as she touched Him....
...virtue was always going out of Him and He was always kindly disposed toward people....

....and He answered him nothing.

How unlike Jesus Christ. So you say to yourself, these words "He answered him nothing" say nothing about the person who did the ignoring, and ought to reveal much about the person who was ignored.

Jesus Christ simply wasn't in the habit of going around ignoring people. To the contrary He was always in a very winsome way paying attention to people. You know very well how devastated you have been when somebody has failed to pay attention to you, when somebody has deliberately ignored you, when somebody has given you the silent treatment. But Jesus Christ did that to Herod -- and He knew exactly that He was doing it to Herod.

What kind of a man was Herod? Not very exemplary. He was a very lustful person. He was a man who stole another man's wife, he was a man who tried to get someone who wore the cloth, figuratively speaking -- a man of God -- to come and say: "That's all right, Herod -- even God will blink at what you've done."

...but John the Baptist could simply say to Herod, the man who stole another man's wife, "It's not lawful for you to have her! She doesn't belong to you!"

He was a lustful character. He had women for only one reason. He had ten of them, and nine at one time.

You want to know what kind of a person he was? Let me read this for you, the words of somebody else whose language is far more colorful and vivid than I could ever paint it for you -- you've got to see Herod as he was. Remember, Jesus Christ just didn't go around ignoring people. But this man He answered him nothing.

....it was Herod's birthday. Now remember, he stole another man's wife to make him the Royal Adulteress, and she had a daughter. Then comes the feast on his birthday. The scene is the grim castle of Machiris(?), one of the most desolate places in the world - - unbelievably sinister, built on the top of a solid crag of black basalt -- 3500 feet above the Dead Sea's eastern shore, with yawning precipices down to the water on three sides of it, and only a knife-edge of rock joining it to the coast...

....in the brilliantly lighted banquet hall, all Herod's company is gathered, the food is rich, the wine runs freely. And while they drank, Salome, a girl of 20, dances half-naked before them....

Herod was notoriously lustful, perhaps hereditarily so, for his father had ten wives, nine at one time. Salome, in what was probably a strip-tease feature, appears before him now, flaunting her physical charms to a sensuous and sentimental man - - gloating, lusting, and drinking alcohol, which notoriously heightens base desires, and lowers the resistance of the will.

...he calls to her, and offers her any present she cares to choose. She, put forward by her adulterous mother, throws herself half-naked on to Herod's knees, twines her arms around his neck, kisses the bloated face, and whispering in his ear, asks for the head of John the Baptist....

...John the Baptist, you know, the man who said to Herod: "You can't have her! - - - down in the dungeon of Machiris, hewn out of the solid rock, the grim deed is done..."

Ah, the king was grieved, says the first Gospel, but for the sake of his oaths and of them that sat at meat with him, he commanded it to be done.

His disciples came and took up the corpse and buried him. And then they went out and told Jesus.

Now, that's the man that Jesus Christ is ignoring. That's the man to whom Jesus Christ is giving the silent treatment. You can understand why, now, can't you? You can even understand it better when I tell you how Jesus felt about John the Baptist, the person who was sacrificed to please the whim of a strip-tease artist and an adulterous mother.

John the Baptist was a friend of Jesus Christ. Whatever else he was, he was a friend of Jesus Christ. And of him Jesus said what He never said of any

other person - - sublimely and beautifully - - said Jesus of John: "Never was man born of woman who is greater than he."

...when the news came to Jesus Christ that this had happened to John the Baptist, He gathered together His disciples and He said, "We've got to get away from here."

You can read it for yourself in the Scriptures, they went off by themselves, as though they wanted to shake from themselves the dust of the wicked world. They simply needed time to pray. And Jesus Christ himself needed time, presumably, if I am able to put it this way, to rid Himself of hatred for someone as despicable as Herod.

Now that's the picture. How do you account for it?

Herod was a person who had become stone-deaf to God. You have to know that during these Sunday mornings in the Lenten season, God willing, as I stand at this sacred desk I'll be wanting to talk with you about the Sins That Crucified Jesus. Now you can't talk about sins without talking about sinners. Sin is not something in the abstract. Sins are committed by persons. Sins and sinners go together - - you can't have one without the other. And in all likelihood each time that I stand here I'll be talking about one person in particular who personified a particular sin. Today it's Herod, the Tetrarch of Galilee, who personified the sin of a corrupt conscience, a stifled conscience, a muffled conscience. He'd allowed himself to get to the point where he was no longer sensitive to what his conscience said to him.

Let me give you another part of the picture. As Pilate sent Him to Herod, Herod then taunted Him, ridiculed Him, made light of Him, flaunted Him - - even issued the order that a perfectly beautiful and gorgeous robe would be placed upon this man, deliberately making fun of Him.

Oh, it was said that he was pleased to see Jesus, because he was hoping that maybe if he snapped his fingers, he could get Jesus to perform some kind of miracle. The interest that he had in Jesus Christ was not one of commitment. It was one of curiosity, one of amusement - - "Let's see what the carpenter-wonder out of Nazareth can do for us right now!" - - that's how he responded to Jesus Christ.....never so much out of adoration.

Can you believe a man would ever allow himself to become like that? But he did. You see, what I'm talking to you about this morning is basically this whole matter of your conscience, God smiled upon us when He gave us a conscience.

We can respond to what is good, and we can be pricked, and troubled, when we respond to that which is evil. And that conscience is always there as the warning signal. Unashamedly, I who tell you a good conscience makes a good pillow - - that I've had my share of sleepless nights, and I stand as one among you now as a person who gives thanks to God for the pricking of the conscience. And there's always hope for a person who responds to a pricked conscience...but when the conscience no longer pricks.....

Robert Southey has a poem about the Inchke Bell. This was a bell-buoy off a dangerous shore of Scotland. In a drunken spree, a wild sea captain, to injure the folks in the harbor, cut the bell from its mooring, and it sank into the depths of the sea. Months afterward that same captain's ship was driven before the storm. His men listened in vain for the sound of the bell-buoy which would guide them safely to port. But there was none. Missing the channel, the ship drove on the rocks and all perished.

...this is a parable of perishing truth. He who muffles conscience, he who stifles conscience, may live to see the day when conscience will not speak....

What would you think of a ship's captain who, sailing off a dangerous coast suddenly through the clouds there in the midst, the flash of a light-house - - but instead of at once altering his course, decided to go on a little farther and wait for a second and a third and a fourth flash - - - he would be guilty, of course he would be, of criminal folly and carelessness. Yet I say to you, as the captain and master of your own soul, do you not act often as foolishly as the captain of that ship? Do not tamper with your conscience, do not lightly dismiss as only an inherent prejudice the distinction which it does make between good and evil. Do not muzzle that warning bell. If it kept you awake last night, thank God that even if you did sin, at least your conscience condemned you for your transgression....and the Spirit of the Lord has not departed from you.

"How can I choose but love Thee, God's dear Son --
O Jesus, loveliest and most loving one?
Were there no Heaven to gain, no Hell to flee,
For what Thou art alone I must love Thee!"

Herod never spoke like that. There was a day when he could have...and Jesus answered him nothing. Do you draw the implication, that now he was past redemption, not of the choosing of Jesus Christ, but of a choice that Herod made. Now you think about that.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Second Sunday in Lent

February 27, 1983

"SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS:
IMPATIENCE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son,
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

You should know by this time that the sermon series scheduled to be preached from the Saint Luke pulpit during the Lenten season centers around the general theme: "THE SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS." Like as not, as each sermon is being preached, there will be one personality in particular who may represent that sin that we will be considering. Which leads me to say to you again as I did last Sunday - - you cannot think of sin in the abstract. When you think of sin you must think of people, for sins are committed by persons.

You cannot separate sin from the sinners.....

- - don't talk to me about love in the abstract, as an example, but let me find someone who loves me, who is kindly disposed toward me, who is willing to meet my basic need, who is willing to look upon me as Jesus Christ looks upon me - - for you must never forget, He said, "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I love you" . . . from the Christian perspective -- to love is to meet the need in the life of a person and to deal with that person as Jesus Christ would deal with that person.....

- - don't talk to me about truth in the abstract, but introduce me to a person who is truthful, and I'll have an appreciation for truth.....

So, say it again and ever so often, you cannot think of sin apart from the sinner.

All that's about to be said from now until the time that this sermon is concluded is based upon this passage of Scripture -- hear it and hear it well -- the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John. And as this passage of Scripture is being read, two people will come into sharp focus. They will stand in marked contrast, the one to the other:

"When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.

And Judas also, which betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples.

Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons.

Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye?

They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, which betrayed him, stood with them.

As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground.

Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way . . . "

As over against this there's another passage of Scripture that you ought to keep in mind that refers to this very instant -- a sign that Judas said he would give to the soldiers - - "I will go to him and I will kiss him. . . "

....and in that same

passage of Scripture Jesus says to Judas:

"Friend, why have you come to me like this?

Betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss?"

Now there you have it. Two people in stark contrast.

From my earliest days in Sunday School I disliked Judas very much. In fact, let me tell you quite frankly, I think I hated him. How could anyone like that do what he did to our Saviour? He was despicable, and I thought him to be down-right diabolical....

....now on the other hand, in stark contrast -- the Master -- calm, courageous, confident, compassionate - - "If you're looking for me, here I am. Let these others go their way . . . "
...always concerned about other people, and compassionately so.

The sin with which we'll deal today in this series is the sin that's personified by Judas Iscariot. I must ask this question, if you don't mind: What is your image of Judas Iscariot? You do him a disservice if you brand him all evil, honestly you do.

I suppose you can subscribe to this fact, that you've made some progress in your spiritual life when you've gotten beyond the point where a person is either 100% evil or 100% good. That just isn't so. What is your image of Judas Iscariot?

(Now before anything else is said, I need to say to you quite parenthetically, there's a member of this parish seated in this congregation about three-quarters back from the pulpit. He was a member of this parish before I came, and I hold him in high regard. One day he came to me after a sermon had been preached, carrying a copy of Saint Luke MESSENGER in his hand, on which there had been an extract of the sermon that was preached on that particular Sunday....frankly and freely he told me something that no parishioner had ever told me before -- "Pastor, as soon as a sermon has been preached, I try to find some time -- maybe an hour, deliberately -- maybe Sunday afternoon, Sunday night, Monday or Tuesday -- as soon as possible, when I can just reflect upon what was said from the pulpit. Sometimes I understand what you said, and sometimes I don't quite understand.....sometimes I agree -- and sometimes I disagree. .")

Occasionally a preacher could tell you what I'm going to tell you, that when a sermon is being planned or being preached, sometimes one face in particular looms upon the horizon, and hopefully that person could be any one of you. Now what I'm about to say to you, I have that person in mind, wondering whether he will agree or disagree with what you're about to hear. And this is it:

The basic trouble with most of us so-called good people is this: we may not be nearly as good as we allow ourselves to think.

Now let me repeat that:

The basic trouble with most of us so-called good people is simply this: we may not be nearly as good as we allow ourselves to think that we are.

Now having said that, back to Judas.

There was a time when I thought he was all bad, but I've tempered my thinking somewhat, because I'm constrained to tell you that I am in duty bound to begin at the point where I ought to begin -- he was someone chosen by Jesus Christ! Could a man be all bad if at some time Jesus Christ would have looked that person in the eye and said, "I need you, I want you! I'll be choosing only twelve, and you're

going to be one of them!" - - - a person can't be all bad if in the eyes of Jesus Christ such a choice could be made. Begin at that point when you think of Judas.

And when you think of Judas, think of him as a person who did not respond to the Master automatically. Jesus Christ did not press a button, and then robot-fashion, Judas Iscariot says: "Yes, Master" . . . "Yes, Master" . . . "Yes, Master" . . . Not at all! Judas made the decision to respond to Jesus Christ. He saw in Jesus Christ something the like of which he had never seen in anybody else, and a person can't be all bad who can see something as wonderful as that in the face of Jesus Christ. Begin at that point.

Now what went wrong? The Scriptures have it - - he was a betrayer. He triggered the situation where Jesus Christ was to be crucified. Call him a tool of the devil, whatever you want to call him, you can't think of the crucifixion without thinking of Judas Iscariot. What happened? What was his besetting sin?

There's a school of thought that maintains that his besetting sin was greed. He was Old Mr. Moneybags. When he thought in terms of the Kingdom, he thought only of the financial aspect.....

...I don't rest my case too much on that. I've never done Judas in just because I allowed myself to think that he was greedy. I can have done with that quickly. I know there's reference to it, but I also know that once he got the 30 pieces of silver, they didn't mean a thing to him.....

There's also a school of thought that maintains that he was envious, that he always considered himself an outsider. He was the only Judean to be included in the group of Twelve - - the rest of them came from up around Galilee. And also, human as he was, there are those who maintain that he became envious of Peter, James and John - - how every now and then Jesus would give a beckoning glance to Peter, James and John and say, "I want to see you afterward" - - and off they'd go by themselves...and there's no record at all of Jesus ever saying to Judas, "You join us this time!" - - - it's human, you see, to want to be recognized.

....some pastors tell me that they have to deal with members of their congregation who allow ill-will to arise up within them because they've never been appointed to a committee, they've never been asked to chair a committee, they've never been placed in a position of preferment....and this, too, begins to fester, because they'd like to have what other people

have been given. There's no record of Jesus ever going to Judas and saying, "Judas, if you don't mind, stick around afterward -- I'd like to get your view on something" -- what this doesn't do for a person's ego! -- to be sought out! -- to be asked for his advice and counsel!

...there's no record, honestly there isn't, of Jesus ever saying to Judas, "How do you account for the fact that things didn't go as well as they did the last place where we preached? How do you account for the fact that this thing is occurring, and people are so slow to respond? . . . "

....well, maybe this was a besetting sin for Judas. But you know by this time, don't you, that it's never just one sin in particular with which we have to deal.

Most of us commit any number of sins simultaneously. But maybe there could be one in particular.

I'm willing to suggest to you now that you think of this one as a besetting sin for Judas. But before I tell you what it is again, let me remind you that I'm willing to believe that he was thrilled to high Heaven when his eye fell upon Jesus Christ and saw Him in action. He had great hopes for the Kingdom of God, and like every devout Jew he longed for the coming of the Messiah, the Messiah who would drive the oppressors into the sea!

-- throw off the yoke of bondage!

-- Israel will have its spot in the sun! -- its favorite place in the earth, that longed-for day will come when one day our Prince arrives on the scene.....

Judas had a way of believing -- "Jesus -- you're it!" -- the evidence was there!

Look at the charisma, look at His dynamic leadership, look at the thousands who came out to hear Him and to see Him. Judas was thrilled, of course he was, and every miracle that was performed -- the evidence that Christ had to control the supernatural -- -- blind people could see....lame people were made to walk....deaf people got their hearing back! Why, even a dead person was brought back from the grave -- -- this is it!

And then there's a school of thought that maintains that Jesus was not acting

the Christian is in duty bound to act out of concern for life and the safety of a person. Material things are secondary. Bless Ethel Anderson, of blessed memory, she used to tell me how her Arnold, Vice President of Safeway for this whole division, used to say repeatedly every time he had a management meeting: "If you're being burglarized, let them have the cash. Our concern is for your personal safety." So a Christian, I suppose, is in duty bound to act on that premise.

I'm also thinking of what used to be a specific code in the British navy. I can't give you the official language regarding it, but would you believe it, the officers of the British navy were advised that in the time of crisis, when they would be wondering what it is that ought to be done, they were given the privilege of ignoring the book, and were simply told -- would you believe it!-- to do the right thing! So one prays for wisdom in the time of a difficulty, that he might be doing what seems to him the right thing, at the right time, and of course doing it for the right reason.

Now before I walk away from the sacred desk I need to bring this to your attention: that while you and I have a way of becoming aroused and infuriated by the work of the criminal, and while we are being taught that the Christian thing to do is to meet the need of the person who is being victimized -- no question about that! Jesus Christ spelled that out beautifully . . . but there is another question, a hard question that needs to be asked, and I'm indebted to somebody else who raised it before I did: Suppose the Good Samaritan, the hero in our story, had been elected to the Jericho Town Council the year before this incident took place. What legislation do you suppose he would have advanced, what commission do you suppose he would have sponsored, to deal with those who had the potential within them to live the life of a criminal?

It's one thing to laud the Good Samaritan for what he did, after the chap had been victimized. But what about a quickened conscience to deal with those things that might prevent the person from giving his life to crime? In the story that Jesus told the man who is the neighbor is the victimized. But Jesus Christ also gives us to understand that any person that we meet is one to whom we ought to be a neighbor, and for whom we ought to have a concern. And what troubles me more than anything else is the apparent insensitivity that we may have on occasion to the person who is on his way to becoming a criminal. Good question, really. A hard one.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

quickly enough, and furiously enough, if you please -- there was a great deal of fervor to establish the Kingdom. I can imagine Judas coming to Jesus and saying,

"Jesus -- don't tell me you're dilly-dallying around with one person at a time! -- you spent a half-a-day with that woman at the well, just to talk with her by herself! -- don't tell me, Jesus, that you allowed Nicodemus to disturb your sleep and you spent the night just talking with him by himself! -- --

Jesus -- get with it! It lies within you to have a mass movement! You can turn this world upside-down overnight -- I know that you can!"

But it wasn't happening that way.

Ambitious for his Master, he became victimized by impatience. That was his besetting sin. The Kingdom of God just wasn't coming fast enough to suit Judas Iscariot. And what is more, it wasn't coming in the way that he perceived it.

I can see good things about Judas. He wasn't all bad.
I can easily believe that because Jesus chose him.
But he was human. And he had a besetting sin.

There's a school of thought that maintains that he went deliberately to the authorities in order to force the hand of Jesus Christ. . . . "I'll put you in a situation, Jesus, where you'll have to declare your Kingdom. Then people will know how great you are. We won't have to wait any longer . . . "....a man become mad because he was impatient....a good man who became mad....

The trouble with most of us so-called good people is that maybe we're not nearly as good as we allow ourselves to believe.

There's a legend. How much stock you want to put in it, that's up to you. But I place some value on it . . . that there was a painter, an artist, who decided to do a painting of the twelve disciples, and take his time until he found just the right character. According to the legend, he began with the favorite of all the disciples, John-the-beloved -- the kind person, a person who seemed to have that very warm spot in the heart of Jesus, if one may use that figure of speech -- the man who had leaned upon the breast of Jesus, as Scripture reminds us -- the man to whom the other disciples would go when they'd want to know what Jesus was thinking, or what He just said ---- John. He painted John first, and then all the others in turn....

...the last person to be painted by the artist was Judas

Iscaariot. He put off painting that dispicable character as long as he could. And then one day he found the person that he thought in his eyes represented the traits and characteristics of a betrayer, and he commissioned him to pose. As he looked at him he had a strange reaction -- there was something about the man that troubled him. What was it? Was it the look in the eye, was it the slant of his forehead, the way he tilted himself -- what was it? He wasn't quite sure, until the person himself came forward saying, "I sat for you before -- some time ago, when you were beginning your painting. I think you had me pose for a person that you called John."

There's a prayer that I pray. I think it comes somewhere out of the Roman Catholic liturgy, I'm not sure. It ends like this: "And in the hour of death, O Lord, suffer none of us to fall from Thee." . . . there is always the possibility that a person can fall from grace.

You want me to stop the sermon at this point? -- don't you dare ask me to stop the sermon at this point! This is not the Gospel, to speak in dark and horrible terms about a person who's fallen from grace. There's another legend, that I cherish. It's not in Scripture, but it's true to the spirit of Jesus Christ who is revealed in Scripture.....

....in the after-life, Jesus meets Judas, and puts His arm around Judas, and uses the same word that He used in the moment of betrayal -- "Friend . . ."

....God's love is as wonderful as that!

And that's the thing to remember.

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Sermon - Pastor Raymond Shaheen
The Third Sunday in Lent

March 6, 1983

"SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS:
EVASION"

WE MAKE, O GOD, so little time to do this sort of thing, to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of Your Word. That we should make the most of it, enlighten us by your Holy Spirit, cleanse us from sin, and make us fit to think Your thoughts; Through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

The Sunday morning series of sermons during the Lenten season, as is generally known, is based upon the theme: "THE SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS." And like as not, by this time you have discovered that we have been dealing with one person in particular who so much personifies the sin that's being discussed on a particular Sunday morning. Hear now this passage of Scripture which must serve as the background for all that we're going to say in the next 18 minutes -- from the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John:

"Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment: and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.

Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man?

They answered and said unto him, If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee.

Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law . . . "

Keep this passage of Scripture also in your mind, will you, the 24th verse of the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

" And when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water, and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, I am innocent of this man's blood. See to it yourselves."

Now if that would be all that you ever knew about Pontius Pilate, you would have enough to say to yourself: His was the sin of evasion. Again and again and again as Jesus Christ appeared before him he tried to skirt the issue. He became

the artful dodger, he side-stepped ever so often, for the simple reason, he could not find it within himself to take a firm stand, that is, decisively, against Jesus Christ or for Jesus Christ.

What could I tell you about Pontius Pilate?

Well, you ought to know that he was about the same age, I dare say, as Jesus Christ. As we see him now, he was about 31 or 32 years of age. He was appointed Procurator in 26 A.D., and served in that capacity for ten years.

- - I think generally it can be said, he was the run-of-the-mill. He was not an extraordinary person. In fact, he would have remained a foot-note in history, if history had paid any attention to him at all, if it weren't for the fact that the Creed-Writers saw fit to read him into the Creed, so that every Lord's Day, or whenever Christians gather together such as those of us who are here now, we could, figuratively speaking, point the finger at Pontius Pilate as we say in the classic fashion -- "Suffered under Pontius Pilate . . ."

Of all the people who were brought up into the drama which constituted the crucifixion, only Pontius Pilate was mentioned by the Creed-Writers. You should also know that he was the last person officially to have any relationship with Jesus Christ. He was the one who conducted the trial.

Now, focus on him sharply and clearly. See him as the artful dodger.

But before I give you the evidence in that case I need to remind you that He disliked the Jews intensely....they were the fly-in-the-ointment as far as he was concerned. They were always keeping him in hot water. There were those who would send reports back to Rome as to how the Procurator of Judaea was doing, and the thing that he dreaded most was to have the report go back concerning him that he wasn't ^{able} ~~able~~ to handle the Jews.

He lived for the most part, I think, at Caesarea. Now anybody who travels in the Middle East, visits the Holy Land, his guide will eventually take him to the Mediterranean and say, "Now this is Caesarea." The ruins are there even to this very day. It was an idyllic spot, and Pilate thoroughly enjoyed being domiciled there. But when it came time for the Passover, he always had to leave that peaceful spot to go to the hot-bed which was Jerusalem itself. because at the time of the Feast of the Passover there was always the possibility that he'd have a riot on his hands, and he was in duty bound to keep peace. So, whenever you think of Pontius Pilate, think of him first as the Procurator who was irritated by the Jews - - who detested them, because they constituted the kind of liability for him.

Now they bring to him one who was stirring up the people. They make the charges. And what does Pontius Pilate do? He seeks out every avenue of not having to make a firm decision concerning Jesus Christ. He does a variety of things, evading the issue always. As an example . . .

- for a while he says, We'll scourge him, we will taunt him, we will ridicule him, we'll draw a bit of blood -- maybe that will satisfy the mob -- I'll try this!and he does. And it doesn't satisfy the mob.....
- then Jesus said something about being a King -- those were the charges they brought against him. So Pilate says, I'll try this: We will put royal purple on him, we will parade him in front of the people, we will make light of him.....

.....that didn't work....

- someone said he was a Galilean -- that rang a bell with Pontius Pilate -- I'll try this method (constantly evading the real issue, you see) -- I'll send him to Herod, I'll let Herod deal with him -- I won't -- I'll put him off on Herod....

....well, Herod never did take Jesus seriously. You remember we talked about Herod one Sunday morning. Herod couldn't care less. His was the sin of a corrupt conscience. He was stone-deaf to God.....and after he dealt with Jesus as a matter of curiosity, Herod sends him back to Pontius Pilate.....

Now Pilate says to himself, what do I do next?

Then he got the idea -- release his prisoner. They can have their choice -- Barabbas or Jesus. I won't decide. Let them decide.

Then after a while it reached the point where his own wife Claudia, who couldn't sleep -- she had a dream concerning Jesus, and she sent word, she interrupted the proceedings, and she said to her husband, "Don't you dare have anything to do with that just man!" And that does it! More than he could handle! What now does he do? Afraid to take a stand.....publicly, he washes his hands in water, and he said, "I am innocent of this man. I'll have nothing to do with him -- you take him -- you be responsible." That's Pontius Pilate.

Joseph Sittler, perhaps our greatest living thinker-theologian in our

Church - - I've noted in my little journal that I keep of observations that people have made what he once said that holds me in good stead: " . . . There comes a time when a person must do what he ought to do . . . "

.....now let me run that by you again.....

" . . . There comes a time when a person must do what he ought to do . . . " Pilate will always be remembered as a person who failed to do what he should have done, and he constantly evaded the issue - - and put it off. Evasion becomes also the sin of procrastination.

Now it's one thing for you and me to sit here very comfortably and say to ourselves, they were the sinners, they committed the great sins, they committed the sins that eventually crucified Jesus. Well, we must never forget, you cannot separate sin from the sinner. The two go together. But I'm also constrained to remind you this morning, that Pontius Pilate was pretty much the run-of-the-mill governor. In fact, had there been a Conference of the Governors Under Rome's Jurisdiction, he wouldn't have stood out one bit! I have every reason to believe that that could be true. He was a very ordinary person, despite the position of preferment that he had as a Procurator. Big sins, so to speak, are not necessarily committed by big people. Anybody can commit a sin. And any sin, no matter how ordinary it can be, is to be taken seriously. That's what you and I must always remember about Pontius Pilate....an ordinary man, committing an ordinary sin, was exceedingly instrumental in crucifying Jesus Christ. *

Now you and I sit here and we point the finger at Pontius Pilate and say, "You were the one who did it - - yours was the so-called big sin and I remind you it was an ordinary sin. And you and I commit that kind of sin every day ourselves - - when we refuse to make a decision, or when we shove something off, and delay. You and I are numbered among those who wash their hands in the water of Procrastination -- put it off -- make somebody else responsible.

At the conclusion of the second service this morning a person said to me, "Do you realize, Pastor, that with all the names that we give the different weeks in the course of the year, that this week now is National Procrastination Week? Ordinarily it begins on a Sunday, but they decided to put it off until tomorrow!" This was Pontius Pilate, who evaded the issue, and shoved it off to somebody else.

I would do you disservice, my friend, I must remind myself, I am the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul, one of them, and I must be as practicable as I can with you - - you and I are guilty of the same sins that Pontius Pilate knew.....

...we evade the issue
...we try to put it off, or shove it off on somebody else
...we're constantly washing our hands in the water of

Procrastination....

I know whereof I speak. Any number of you have told me how important you believe Bible study to be....but any number of you are perfectly content to put that responsibility off into the hands of a small group of people to do it. We put it off -- to some other time....

....there isn't a parent of a teenager who doesn't understand what I'm about to say now. We all know the necessity of talking about values to those whom God has given to us. But what do we do? We put it off to some other time, a more convenient season, and we'll talk about God, and sin, and Heaven, and Hell, and the value of the Church -- we'll put off speaking to some other time about the basic values and principles of morality....

....or if we don't delay doing it ourselves, we'll shove it onto somebody else, Pontius Pilate fashion -- "You do it!"

....let somebody else deal with this.....

We're all guilty of this kind of thing, not standing up to the issue. And if we do recognize it, delay it.

There isn't a single one among you who can't wax enthusiastic about the possibility of tithing -- "Think how wonderful it would be if everybody tithed!"but we have a way of procrastinating -- putting our tithing off to some other day when we'll be in a better position to think of it as a possibility. But not today!....or we will be perfectly content to let a small minority do it, just because we don't face the issue.

We talk about Heaven, we talk about Hell, in guarded fashion -- never really coming to vital grips with it, except occasionally....we put off thinking of the possibility that I some day will die! We want other people to think in those terms....we evade facing directly the fact of Judgment. But there is a Heaven, and there is a Hell -- "Let the preacher do my thinking on that score for me."we either put off thinking about it by ourselves, or shove it onto somebody else.

I shudder when I think of what goes on in the realm of inter-personal relationships.....I shudder when I think of what goes on in the realm of our relationships with other nations, how we ought to face deliberately the great issues of our time....we put off thinking about it by ourselves, or we shove it off to

somebody else! - - you and me, who have been endowed by our Creator with the faculty of being able to think, and to reason, and to sort out the issues in order to make a decision!

You ask me what I learned from Jonestown - do you remember it, that terrible thing that happened a few years ago? What I learned from Jonestown I learned at the feet of a writer from Australia, I think it was, who when he was reflecting upon that terrible thing, he simply said, "There comes a time, lonely as it may be, when every man must think for himself." Pontius Pilate couldn't think for himself. He wanted someone else to do his thinking for him. Pontius Pilate couldn't make a decision - - he wanted someone else to make the decision. Little would he realize that precious bit of graffiti that was found on the wall of a building in a great city: "NOT TO DECIDE IS TO DECIDE" - - his indecisiveness was in itself a kind of a decision.

There is a famous legend from which Mt. Pilatus in Switzerland takes its name, that over the waters of Lake Luzerne at the foot of the Swiss Mountains, there can be seen on moonlight nights the ghost of Pilate, forever moaning, forever washing his hands.....it is as though the whole universe will offer no retreat or rest to one who evades reality, puts off that moment of truth when a man must think for himself.

God has endowed us with the capability to think. But God always gives us something over and beyond the initial gift. He's blessed us with the Holy Spirit by which it's possible for us to be enlightened and to be empowered, and to arrive at a God-like decision.....this I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE FACE IN THE WINDOW"

" . . and enable us by Your Holy
Spirit to think Your thoughts.
Make us worthy to offer divine
worship to you. Amen."

Matthew 27:36

"Then Pilate's soldiers took Jesus into the
governors palace, and the whole company gath-
ered around him. They stripped off his clothes,
and put a scarlet robe on him.
Then they made a crown of thorny branches and
placed it on his head and put a stick in his
right hand. And then they knelt before him and
made fun of him.
Long live the King of the Jews, they said. They
spat on him and took the stick and hit him over
the head.
When they had finished making fun of him they
took the robe off and put his own clothes back
on him, and then they led him out to crucify him.
As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene
named Simon, and the soldiers forced him to carry
Jesus' cross. They came to a place called Golgotha,
which means the Place of the Skull.
And they offered Jesus wine mixed with a bitter
substance. But after tasting it he would not
drink it.
They crucified him, and then divided his clothes
among them by throwing dice.
After that, they sat there and watched him . . . "

You see, there wasn't much else to do. The worst had already been done.
The betrayer did what he did.....the denier did what he did.....and all the
disciples, they forsook Him and went away....

....Pilate had done what seemed right in his eyes, refusing to
take a stand, washed his hands of the whole affair.....

....Herod couldn't have cared less....

....and Caiaphas was quite pleased that everything was
turning out the way that he had hoped it would....this, now
was going to be the end....

....and as far as the soldiers were concerned, they were simply
doing what had to be done, they were following orders, and they
obeyed....

There wasn't much else to do....."So sitting down, they watched him there . . "

To a very large degree, that's been the trouble that Jesus Christ has had on His hands throughout all ages. Any number of people settle down just to look. They remain detached, they don't allow themselves to relate, they don't allow themselves to get involved. But somehow He can't be ignored, they won't quite turn their back on Him. They just settle down and look.

Three of the happiest years of my life I spent in Divinity School, our Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. The school was located on a hill about a mile from down-town Gettysburg. Occasionally on a night such as this, when we'd become a bit tired of studying right after the evening meal, a couple of us would walk down to Gettysburg. Invariably we'd head for Britcher and Bender's Drug Store, where the great moment came in sipping a coke and eating a hard pretzel....

....but invariably on the way down we passed a certain house, where to this day when I return to Gettysburg, I think of it as the house-with-the-face-in-the-window. There was a person there who sat inside that window. That person was always there whenever we went down-town Gettysburg. The eyes followed us, once the eyes got glimpses of us, showing little sign of emotion whatsoever, but just looking out the window from a same vantage-point, watching whatever passed by.

That's about all I can tell you about that person. That person made no contribution to my life, that person made no contribution to the passing scene. And I have reason to believe that had I gotten myself into deep trouble, that person would have remained immobilized, safe and secure, on the other side of the window. That person was quite content to just settle in and watch.

There are people who do that as far as Jesus Christ is concerned -- can't quite ignore Him.....just sit there and look.

Well I am going to be as generous as I can be as far as the soldiers are concerned. I'm inclined to think they did have some thoughts regarding Him, however. If one could listen in on their conversation as they sat there and watched Him, one of them might have said to the other,

"Poor fellow, he should have stuck to preaching! --
preaching and general statements - - handing out
nice platitudes in favor of God and motherhood - -
that's what he should have done."

And the other might have said,

"Yes, I heard he was a carpenter at one time. Seemed to me he would have been better off if he'd have stayed in that carpenter shop! You can't get into too much trouble -- who can find fault with your work as long as you do your work well! He'd have been better off if he'd remained a carpenter . . . "

And a third one probably might have spoken up and said,

" . . But we live by dreams, and he was a dreamer. And they tell me that he kept telling people that if they'd just have faith in one another, and they turned the cheek, and if they'd pray, and if they's just allow themselves to believe in the goodness of God, everything will turn out some day the way we'd like it to turn out. He was a dreamer, alright! If only he could have gone on dreaming! But he had to turn those tables upside-down in the Temple, you see. If only he'd have stayed with his dreams -- instead of saying unkind things about some of our leaders, instead of taking them to task. Why couldn't he learn to keep his mouth shut on certain things, and regarding certain people. Why, I even heard it, that he called Herod a fox! You can't do that in this world. There are forces who just won't let you get away with it.

.....to dream is one thing...but then to try to practice what you preach, and to turn the other cheek! I wouldn't be a bit surprised if after a while we didn't hear him say, 'Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing'"

Maybe as they sat there and looked at Him they had such thoughts as these, as they reflected and reasoned among themselves.

But not a single one of them saw anything in Him that moved them to do anything noble. Not a single one of them, even as they sat there and watched and even reflected among themselves was constrained to say, "That's going to make a change in my life. I can never again be the same, now that I have been exposed to Him." We have no record that anything like this ever happened, just like I have reason to believe that that face in the window would have been very content just to look at me, had a car run me down, had somebody mugged me on those peaceful streets of Gettysburg.....maybe the face in the window would have reflected "Poor fellow, he should have stayed on the Hill with his books.

He shouldn't be walking the streets" - - maybe the face-in-the-window would have reflected and reasoned that way....

" . . . and sitting down they watched him there . . . " . . . and Christ has had this kind of thing on His hands ever since. Any number of people have allowed themselves to become a spectator sport where He's involved.

It's been twenty years now since I undertook that assignment for the Board of World Missions and went around the world, it's been twenty years since I first went to Hong Kong. I remember all the misery that I saw in Hong Kong, the deprivation, the disadvantaged, the ill-clad, the starving. There was a preacher from Baltimore who made the same trip. He told his congregation when he came back, "I couldn't wait to come back and show you all the pictures that I took. And tonight, when I make my report to you, I want you to look for one picture in particular."

....he was quite proud of it -- a tremendous study. As he was walking down one of the streets of Hong Kong he came upon a bake-shop, with all those good things on the shelves, tempting the passers-by, wooing the customers, by sight and smell alike. But what struck the eye of my preacher-friend from Baltimore was this: there was an urchin, a youngster, suffering from malnutrition, half-starved, who was drawn to the window of the bake-shop, and he pressed his nose against the window - - what a study!....and had even fallen asleep, undoubtedly dreaming of the baked goods that he'd never taste!

....that was the prize photo in the collection of my preacher-friend from Baltimore. Quite pleased that he had found it -- a great study.

....his bubble was burst, however, when after the meeting and the showing of the last slide, a lady came up to him and simply asked the question: "What did you do after you took the picture?"
...and he had to admit that he simply walked down the street - - turned around for a moment, and just looked.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS:
FANATICAL NATIONALISM"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Matthew 27: 16

Today's sermon is the next-to-the-last in the series based upon the general theme: "SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS." You'll want to keep this particular passage of Scripture in mind as this sermon is being preached, and the reference is to the 27th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew:

"And they had then a notable prisoner called Barabbas.
Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate
said to them, Whom will ye that I release unto you,
Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?
For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.
When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife
sent unto him saying, Have thou nothing to do with
this just man, for I have suffered many things this
day in a dream because of him.
But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the
multitude that they should ask for Barabbas and
destroy Jesus.
The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of
the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said,
Barabbas.
Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with
Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him,
Let him be crucified. . . ."

This Lenten series, as you may have deducted by this time, has a three-fold purpose. Let me remind you:

- one - as each sin is considered we find ourselves dealing with a particular person, because you can't think of sin in the abstract. Sin becomes meaningful as you encounter the sinner. You can't talk about sin without talking about people who commit sins. You can't separate the one from the other.
- secondly (now this may surprise you, because we're all inclined to make one thing greater than another) -- secondly - it could be said that no one sin seemed to have been the sin which crucified Jesus Christ. It was a collection of sins, and the spectrum is wide. And honestly now, no one sin seems greater than another, and because that is true, we can't afford to take any sin lightly. For any sin, you see, could crucify Jesus Christ.

-- and thirdly, the fact of sin remains constant from one generation to another. Only the faces of the sinners change from one era to another. Now brace yourself for this: because it's so easy for us to think of something that happened long ago -- they were the sinners, and they sinned grossly, in that day. But we're more enlightened, you see, we're more sophisticated, and we know more about God....and we know so much more about ourselves. We couldn't possibly do what they did. Well, let me say it for you again -- the fact of sin remains constant from one generation to another. Only the faces of the sinners change from one era to another. The sins that crucified Jesus Christ are with us today....and with them we must deal.

Now, the sin that we consider this morning, for want of a better term, I'm branding it FANATICAL NATIONALISM . . . and there is one person in particular who personifies it. He's the man named Barabbas -- the only person caught up, I dare say, in the crucifixion drama that's mentioned by all four of the Gospel writers.

It was a clever thing, you see, at least Pilate thought so in his evasiveness, in his trying to side-step -- when he came upon the idea: I won't decide, I'll let the people decide....and I'll give them a choice. . . this is the time of the year when they clamor for clemency, and they usually release a prisoner. . . . there's that notorious one, Barabbas, the revolutionary. They can decide! And that's exactly what he did: "Which now of the two do you want?"

...there was no question in their minds -- they chose Barabbas.... And I dare say, in all likelihood we would have done the same thing. It's only because we have history on our side, it's only because right now we're removed from the arena where these kinds of decisions have to be made that we allow ourselves to think that we would have voted for Jesus Christ.

Now what can I tell you about Barabbas?

Well, he came from a distinguished family.

-- he was learned in the Scriptures....

-- he had a high regard for Jewish history -- he'd almost hear the drum-beat every time someone recited one great chapter after another of how the Israelites went out to do battle and how God was always guiding them and how God was always protecting them. There was a light in his eyes that almost seemed like fire when he remembered the history of the people of Israel.

There are those who tell me that he was the son of a rabbi. They also tell me that he had a name which was the same name as the Christ -- both of them had the name Jesus. Now there's nothing unusual about that. In the day of our Lord any number of people were called Jesus. And I presume because that happened to have been true, that Pilate makes the distinction now, "Which of the two do you want? -- Barabbas, or the Jesus (and he qualifies it) who is called Christ?"

I've kept for the last the fact that he was a revolutionary. He was a zealot. His allegiance was more political than religious. He dreamed of the day when Israel could be established again and the Romans could be driven into the sea. He belonged to the Zealots, an insurrectionist group who were waiting for the word from their leader, when they would rise up and brutalize anyone who interfered with their attempt to shake off the yoke of the oppressor.

As I've anticipated preaching this sermon this morning, I've tried to cast Barabbas in the role of a contemporary figure in world history, and I have no difficulty at all in saying he presumably was the Menachim Begin of his day -- a radical of the radicals....a revolutionary of the revolutionaries. And by the same token I can very comfortably say to you, he could also be cast in the role of an Yassar Arafat -- who had this zeal for his people, who was committed to his cause, who was a veritable fire-brand, who lived for only one thing: to establish his people with their place in the sun, and a willingness to sacrifice his life in order to accomplish what he had in mind.

There was a time, I presume, when both Jesus and Barabbas were patriots. I've no difficulty at all believing that Jesus was a devout and faithful Jew, and had a high and holy regard for the stock from which He was stemming. That's very understandable....

....and Barabbas too was a patriot. And there's much to be said for patriotism.....

But patriotism can go sour, and when it becomes fanatical it can become despicable. And I'll tell you why.

When a person thinks as Stephen Douglas did -- "My country, right or wrong, but right or wrong, always my country"

....you can rule out the brotherhood of man, and the Family of God, as he thinks in terms only of his own people. That can be very dastardly.

Not too long ago a distinguished Senator from the great state of Georgia stood up on the floor of the Senate -- not far away from where you are seated, just a matter of minutes! -- and as they were dealing with the threat of nuclear

warfare, in true Stephen-Decatur-fashion he said, "If there should come a time when there's nuclear warfare, and we're all reduced to the Adam-and-Eve level and we begin all over again, I want that Adam and I want that Eve to be full-blooded Americans, and I want to find them here on this continent, and not in Erope."

....how would you feel if you were a full-blooded European, and someone speaks like that? - - how would you feel if you lived in Asia, and someone speaks like that? - - it's all right for us to be annihilated, it's all right for us to be incinerated, but America - - as though they have a favorite spot in God's eye! Are they more entitled to it than we, if one should covet living in that kind of a world that's been destroyed?

This is the trouble with fanatical nationalism, you see. It puts blinders on our eyes and we think in terms only of ourselves and of ourselves alone.

Don't get me wrong, when I think of my father, who came from Lebanon, I thank him for two things in particular....(1) that he was an adherent of the Christian faith, and that he saw fit to have me baptized into the Family of God..... ..and the second thing is, that he was never content, as he was leaving his homeland, until he could find his place in America. Don't get me wrong, I'm very comfortable having two flags on display in this place, the one that represents our loyalty to God, and the one that represents our loyalty to our fatherland. But I'm also fully aware of the fact that in other parts of the world there could be two flags as well, and that other flag their flag. But we need to keep our priorities straight: God....then country. Barabbas didn't have his priorities straight. He thought only in terms of his people....his Israel....his nation -- and the others be damned!

The trouble with patriotism is that we may make an idolotry of it, or we fail to appreciate what is proper, we can scorn it and hold it in contempt. And either one can be dastardly.

But let's get back again to fanatical nationalism so personified by Barabbas. It's willingness to resort to violence, and to accomplish its purpose by brutality, and murder, and to think first in terms of war - - that's the difficulty with fanatical nationalism - - -

...eventually it thinks of only one weapon, the weapon of destruction...

...the trouble with fanatical nationalism is that it's spawned in hate of other people -- an obsession with your own rightness

...the trouble with fanatical nationalism is - - it makes
all other people less than we are.

I have my moments when I go back and live those terrible days of the 60's, and I remember the Vietnam conflict, the things with which I have to contend even to this day and perhaps to the day I breathe my last, is that there was a feeling among many of us in the States that those people over there were less than we were, and because there were so many of them, life became cheap, and it didn't make much difference if a Vietnamese died. But you see, in God's sight, we're one people, we're one family, we are one brotherhood.

When our Lord was here on earth they came to Him again and ever so often and tried to put Him into a uniform with the insignia of the Star of David on it. But He'd have none of it, He wouldn't gain their support if it meant He would subscribe to the fanatical nationalism. Two things wrong with it: You allow yourself to believe that you place a greater value on your own people as over against the other people; and the second thing is: You accomplish your aim by placing too much emphasis upon violence. So Pilate says, "Take your choice - - you can have two Messiahs." ...he didn't realize that, but that's what he was doing - - the Messiah which is the kind of Jesus Christ whose Kingdom is not of this world, whose Kingdom is based upon peace and love and a regard for every single person who lives -- the Messiah who says, "Every person, no matter his color, his condition, his servitude, no matter where you may find him, that person is unique because he is a living human being!the other Messiah says, They can be less than we are.

Fanatical nationalism may say all people are equal, but they allow themselves to believe that some people are a bit more equal than others, and that's always dangerous.

I have my moments when I thank God for the great folks, the great people that I have been privileged to meet and to hear. One of them was the saint that came out of Japan, Toyohiko Kagawa - - a little bit of a fellow, bespectacled, who committed himself to the Kingdom of God. In October, 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor, he came to America as a one-man mission on peace and reconciliation. He was interviewed. Somebody made bold to ask him, "Do you believe now that was was inevitable?" - - realizing the strained relationships between the Japanese and the Americans....

....Kagawa, two months before Pearl Harbor, said, "I believe it is inevitable because of the way things have gone." He said, "I need to explain to you - - after World War I we Japanese established a wonderful friendship with the British and the people of the United

March 20, 1983

"SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS:
COUNTERFEIT RELIGION"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Today's sermon is the last in the series based upon the general theme: "THE SINS THAT CRUCIFIED JESUS." As some of you may know, there are some preachers given to gimmickry, they will try this or that spectacular thing as they endeavor to interpret the Word of God. There was that one preacher in particular who, when he tried to impress upon the minds of his congregation their identification with the crucifixion, surprised them and startled them as he walked down the aisle of the church, garbed as a gladiator, and when he reached the mid-point in the Nave, he turned and addressed the congregation -- not from the pulpit, of course, but from the place where he was standing, and simply shouted "I was there! -- and so were you!"

....then there was that other preacher who resorted to this kind of thing: he announced that when they would come to church the next Lord's Day, he would identify for them each person in particular who was responsible for the death of Jesus Christ. As they came expectantly, the service was conducted in the Nave....and when it came time for the sermon, he said, "The sermon as such will not be preached from the pulpit. The title for the sermon is 'Who Crucified Jesus Christ?'" -- and then he gave them this directive: "You will please go to the parish hall" . . . and there at one end of the parish hall he had erected during the week a booth-like structure -- a tiny room with a door, and he instructed each member of the parish to go in turn and open the door, and then on the inside it would be revealed to them well, you've guessed it of course -- on the inside was a full-length mirror, and each person could see for himself his own reflection. For he, too, was responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.....

I have not given myself to that kind of thing, as you well know by this time. But each Lord's Day as we've dealt with this theme I've tried to do it as forthrightly and as simply as possible.

I would be less than honest if I did not tell you - I've put far more of myself into the preaching of this series than any of you may be able to realize. In a certain sense it has not been a very easy series to preach. It's not always easy, if ever it's easy, to talk about sin. For sin is diabolical and sin is deathly. It alienates, it separates us from Jesus Christ....it leads to death.

It's not easy to preach a series of sermons on sin because it's so easy for some of us who, when the preacher is talking about sin, to allow themselves to believe that he's talking about other people - - you see, other people, they're the sinners. We are so stained by original sin that we find that it's so very, very easy to think of other people as the sinners.

And then it's not been an easy thing to preach this series because anyone who interprets the Gospel must always remember that the final word is not about sin, death and damnation - - - the preacher must move quickly to the glorious theme of hope, and grace, and salvation.

This morning, the final in the series. And this is the text, the 49th verse of the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to John. It reads in this manner:

" . . . and one of them . . . "

now let me stop for a moment there: "...one of them."
You won't forget, will you, as whatever you may remember of the series, that you can't think of sin without sinners. Sin in the abstract has little meaning for any of us. Love is meaningful for me because I have met persons who loved me, and who personified love in their life....Truth is meaningful for me because I have met people who are truthful. Sin in the abstract has no meaning. Whenever you think of sin, remember, it is people - - people commit sin. Sin and the sinner go together....

" . . . and one of them . . . "

-- and throughout this series we've thought of one person in particular as we've thought of a specific sin, and this morning's sermon in the series is no exception..

" . . . and one of them . . . " (this is the person today)
named Caiphas, being the high priest . . . "

-- well, I'd better stop there too, to better identify him....

...that means he was a churchman. It means he was a

high churchman....

...it means he was a religious person, it means he was a very religious person...

...it means he was a person who made religion the business of his life....

" . . . and one of them, named Caiphas, being the high priest that same year, said to them, You don't know anything. It is expedient that one man should die for the people and that the nation itself should not perish . . . "

Now, here's the background for this, and it's very important that you get this. Jesus Christ had spent three years wandering around from place to place, motivated, of course, to do what His Heavenly Father wanted Him to do, to be nothing less than love and to speak the truth in love, and to encounter this person and that person, and to get that person to understand that that person is precious in God's sight, that every single person is an object of God's love -- trying to give them, if you please, some taste of Heaven here on earth. He spent those three years in that kind of ministry. And now He had reached the point where included in His ministry, two things quite unusual:

- one was bringing Lazarus back from the dead -- extraordinary, to say the least, and people talked a great deal about it. His name was on the lips of many people....
- the other thing -- quite unlike this extraordinary thing, but equally extraordinary -- He'd gone into the Temple and discovered that there were people, money-changers, who were exploiting their role and bleeding the people and defiling the place of prayer. With force He drove them from the Temple....

Now these two things got back to some of the Sanhedrin, some of the scribes, some of the Pharisees, representatives of the established church. And in their consternation they seek out Caiphas -- the high priest.

Caiphas was very clever. He gives them to understand: You don't panic, now, you don't give way to hysteria! Of course he's a threat! . . . if he didn't say it in so many words, he gave them to understand that he recognized it -- he was that incisive, he was that perceptive -- "Of course this man's a threat to us! But don't panic, don't give way to hysteria! -- I'll tell you what " And then he coined a phrase, which is always the clever work of a cunning person -- you phrase it somehow, and then people hide behind that

phrase and they use the very phrase as a weapon. Caiphas said: "It is expedient that one man should die for the people, lest the nation itself should perish" -- that's it! -- we'll work for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ -- we'll get Rome to condemn him, we'll have it made . . . it's as simple as all that!"

And having told you this, you must say to yourself, it was Caiphas, the man who first suggested the possibility of having Jesus Christ done away with. To the end of time the indicting finger is pointed to this man in particular, Caiphas.

Listen carefully, now. It may surprise you to hear me say this to you: When I meditate upon the Seven Words From The Cross, nothing does quite as much for my soul as when I hear our Blessed Lord say, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they do." -- I'm inclined to suggest to you that when Jesus offered that prayer, He did not have Caiphas in mind! For Caiphas, I am willing to believe, knew very well what he was doing -- cool, calculating, cunning Caiphashe knew what he was up to.

Caiphas was a religious man, a very religious man, a man who made religion his business. Now having said that to you, I know what some of you are thinking --

- all religions are alike! You can't trust any one of them!

...and some of you, well maybe not among you, but there are some people who delight in taking pot-shots at religion and religious leaders. And so, when I have told you what I have told you now about Caiphas, you say, Ah! That's it! Every religious leader is hypocritical, he exploits his office! He takes advantage of his status, he feathers his own nest, he thinks only of himself and of himself alone.....and there are times when such criticism can be justified.

- or you may say to yourself, "All religions are alike, they are factious and they're futile....

But I wouldn't encourage you to think overmuch in either one of those directions. Mindful of the fact that I am -- Caiphas was religious -- having the high office of the high priest....making religion the business of his life.....I must also say to you, in a certain sense every one of us takes the title of being religious, or you wouldn't be here! The vast majority of the people that I know, either inside the church or outside the church, may take the label of being religious because there's somehow that they relate to God, in varying degrees.

It isn't so much that you're religious -- that's not the acid test. The

acid test: How close are you to Jesus Christ? How supportive are you of Jesus Christ? Where do you stand in your relationship to Him? . . . that's the acid test.

There's no question about where Caiphas stood. He exploited his office, and he thought only in terms of maintaining his prestige and his position, and he was able to maintain that position because he collaborated with the state, and with political forces. It's risky business to do that. And with all the strength that my soul can command, let this sermon now at this point be as relevant as last week's newspaper, or the week before, when a particular religious leader comes out to align himself with a political group -- it's risky business for the Church ever to align itself, lest it be exploited by the force with whom it allies itself. Let there be no misunderstanding at this point, I have encouraged members of this congregation to enter the political arena, but I have never allowed myself to endorse one particular political candidate. It's risky business for the Church ever to allow itself to be put in the position where it could be exploited by political forces -- even the state itself.

I cringe when I think of our brethren in Europe who allow themselves to be labeled as Christian Social Democrats. Caiphas made the mistake of mistakes in allowing himself to be constantly allied with the state and the occupying authorities. In order to keep his position, then, he sacrificed Jesus Christ.

You and I must constantly ask ourselves the question:

not, are we religious?

not, how often do I pray? -- as high a value as I place
on prayer...

not, how often do I show up in church? -- as much as with
my dying breath I'll encourage you to come
together and find yourselves within the gathered
company....

....the acid test-of-tests is always this: How close am I to Jesus Christ?

How much do I allow Him to dominate
my life and to rule my life?
How much do I pray for the Holy
Spirit to relate me to my Heavenly
Father?

It's been said many times, that the enemy of the Church may not be on the outside as much as on the inside. Caiphas was a member of the established church....Judas

was a member of the Twelve....Peter was a member of the Twelve - - as painful as it is for me to tell you this - - it was an established churchman who triggered the death of Jesus Christ.

Winifred and I in company with others were thrilled when a dream, one of the dreams of a lifetime became a reality when we were able to walk the Great Wall of China. Built more than 2,000 years ago - - almost 4,000 miles in length, it took ten years, a decade, to build, with enforced labor of 300,000 peasants -- 20 feet high, made out of mud and stone. And the emperor allowed himself to believe that now the central kingdom would be impregnable...the Great Wall of China.

...but China was invaded on more than one occasion, for the simple reason that they failed to take into account the vulnerability of the watchman on the wall, who allowed himself to be bribed. And China's greatest enemy was not from without, but from within.

" . . . Were you there when they crucified my Lord? . . . "
...to the everlasting credit of the disciples, when Jesus said, "One of you shall betray me" each in turn answered: "Lord, is it I?"

...Caiphas did not have to do what he did....

...Judas did not have to do what he did.....

...Peter did not have to deny....

...all the disciples did not have to forsake Him and flee....

The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has promised to us in this our day the Holy Spirit, by which it is possible to withstand the force of the Devil. Evil is strong, but it's only the second strongest force! The power of God is always greater. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"PRECIOUS FEW"
(Acts 10: 40-41)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Before the reading of the text, permit me to tell you what the text says. It deals specifically with a glorious truth and a shocking fact. It makes reference to Jesus Christ -- who came into the world, who suffered, died, having been crucified. But on the third day, the text makes perfectly plain, He arose, and then He revealed Himself. But notice very carefully how the text puts it -- "but not to everyone . . . " . . . but only to a few . . . " It's the 10th chapter of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, a portion of the 39th, 40th and 41st verses:

" . . . And we are witnesses of all things
which he did both in the land of the Jews,
and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged
on a tree;
Him God raised up the third day, and
showed him openly;
Not to all the people . . . but to us . . . "

The three-hour Good Friday service had been concluded. Shortly thereafter the preacher and I were walking across the upper parking lot, and I did as you know that I would do, I commended him on his preaching. With a modicum of modesty he replied, "One doesn't always do as well as one would like to do."and under my own breath I added, " . . . and one doesn't always do as well as one should . . . "

It's that sentiment that prevails upon my mind as I stand at the sacred desk today and look back over 42 - 43 - 44 - 45 different Easters when I have preached an Easter sermon. I make a confession to you: when every single one of those sermons had been preached, I suffered a measure of frustration and failure - - - for I was dealing with the Central Truth of the Christian religion . . . and I could not do it justice.

This morning as I stand at the sacred desk I think I can tell you one reason at least why those Easter sermons never came off as well as I would like to

have had them come off, and certainly as well as they should have come off: I was awed by the responsibility of trying to explain to people what happenedI earnestly was trying to deal with things that they didn't understand.

Now let me say to you as quickly as I can, if you've come here this morning with wishful thinking that I'm going to explain everything to your satisfaction, you've come to the wrong place. Two years ago when I last stood at this place on an Easter Day, I made plain to you as earnestly as I could that Easter is not something that you explain . . . Easter is something that you experience, just as God ultimately cannot be explained - -

- - like love -- who can explain love? Love
is something that you experience . . .

And if you think I have come here this morning to try to help you with the things that you don't understand, I'm not so sure that I'm going to fulfill your expectation in that regard. But quite frankly I can say to you, I would like very much on this Easter Day, in as simple a manner as I can, to talk to you about some of the things that you can't possibly misunderstand.

Now having said all of that, let me tell you about John Huss of Bohemia. As to the authenticity of what you're about to hear, I can't quite vouch. But I honestly believe that it could have happened the way I'm going to tell you, and the truth that it represents can't possibly be ignored or discredited....

...I once heard it said that when John Huss, declared a heretic, was to be burned at the stake, they donned him with all his ecclesiastical vestments and paraded him through the streets of Prague . . . and they laughed him to scorn..... And then they came to a particular place where he was to be tied to the stake, for the sentence was: "Death by burning" . . . and at his feet they heaped his writings. And as they ignited the writings and the flames began to lap up around his feet, John Huss laughed into their faces - - laughed at the folly of people who thought that they could destroy truth.....

It may be a far cry from John Huss of Bohemia to Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, Colesville Road at Highland and Dale Drives, Silver Spring, Maryland - - - it may even be a farther cry from this place to that hill out-

side a city wall, and then close by the garden tomb where they placed the body of Jesus. And you and I may smile very broadly to ourselves when we remember how they came to Pontius Pilate and they said to him, "We'd like to keep him safe in the grave, that man Jesus - let us have your support." And Pontius Pilate agreed and said, "You have some soldiers, you have a guard - go ahead! seal the stone, secure the grave . . ." You and I may smile very broadly when we think of that.

It was no small stone that had been rolled into position as a door for that grave. It took, as you might suppose, a bit of shoving and pushing. Presumably, the soldiers who were sent to seal the stone believed it was worth the effort. Of course! Inside, shut within a tomb, they finally had their man Jesus.

...go ahead, let me be as helpful as I can in this sermon . . .

But, come now. Are many among us today much different from them? We, too, have a way of putting Jesus Christ in a safe place.

How about those who keep Him shut up within the pages of a book? Really they do, since about the only time they think of Him is when they reach for the Bible - or worse still as they glance occasionally, albeit respectfully, in its direction as it lies, no matter how dust-free, yet unopened on the table.

...a Christ shut up in a grave is little different from a Christ who is shut up within a closed book....

How about those who confine Him within ancient creed and dogma, keeping Him somewhat harmless in all those borrowed words that flow easily and thoughtlessly, and I could add, so piously, from their lips?

...you ought never to forget Browning's Archbishop. Browning tells about the Archbishop who in a most sanctimonious tone, kneels before the altar, and with reverence and respect offers his intonation to the deity: "O Lord God Almighty - -"

...only to have the voice from Heaven reply, "Yes?"

They found the Archbishop dead. He didn't know how to handle a God that's suddenly come alive to meet his present need.....

...you remember the ancient Greek myth of the statue that one day came alive, and they didn't know how to handle her.....

Jesus, imprisoned in stained glass or carvings of wood -- we can box Him there -- but to let Him be made free!

How about those who close the door on Him once they've stopped by for an occasional visit within hallowed walls such as these -- quite content to leave Him behind as they saunter out into a world without Him?

Some of us went to South America on that special assignment a few years ago. We were told that in Peru, as an example, a scarcity of Roman Catholic priests -- only two were ordained that year for the entire country . . . and then we found our way one day in an Andean village, where the priest, because of the scarcity of priests, came only once a year to bring the people the Sacrament. And it's been said that he made his visit and the service was over -- God bless them -- in their sentimental way the devout Andean peasant, leaving the church, would turn back and say, knowing full well that they wouldn't be back until another year -- "Goodby, Jesus! . . . Goodby, Jesus!" And Jesus was kept within the walls of a place, no matter how holy, and perchance they went out into a world without Him. A Christ locked up in a church may be no more vital than a Christ who is shut up in a tomb.

And while we are at it -- how about those who have positioned Him in the remote Past? Perchance they will think of Him with reverence and respect but only as Someone, special as He may be, who lived long ago and a half-a-world-away. In doing so, wittingly or unwittingly, He remains the-One-who-was.

But here's a happy thought: when I think of people such as you -- and hear me, and hear me well -- there are some, not many perhaps, who are a precious few for whom Jesus Christ is totally and completely alive. He appears to them in the here and now with all the freedom that becomes the waves of eternity. He has a way of showing up -- and you know it -- in the strange as well as the familiar. And how well you know this -- He may not always come to us exactly on our terms, coming to us when, where and how we think He should. But show up He will -- in one way or another. According to our schedule, He may sometimes come soon, he may sometimes come late. Yet as far as He is concerned, He's always on time!

States of America -- we looked up to you, we wanted to have heroes in our lives, we wanted someone to exemplify for us certain traits and characteristics, and Britain and America -- you did that for us!....

....but then in the years that followed World War I, you gave our students to understand that you really didn't want them in your schools, and when they would come to America, you looked upon them and you allowed them to believe that they were inferior. We Japanese are a proud people, and they came back to us....

...and then in the meantime the Germans began to court us, and the Nazis to capture our enthusiasm, and we looked to them...."

...and then his face grew very grim. And he said, "I will tell you something. There was in California a student from Japan. He wanted to get his hair cut. He went to a barber shop in Los Angeles. The barber paid no attention to him when he came in, completely ignored him all the while he was cutting other people's hair....and then finally the Japanese student was the only person left in the shop . . . " And Kagawa said, " . . . the barber said, 'The shop is closed now -- I don't cut any damned Jap's hair' "

Kagawa said, "That man now is in a position of great responsibility in Japan, and he'll be one of the persons who will be deciding just when and how Japan goes to war with the United States of America."

Which Jesus do you want? -- the Messiah of fanatical nationalism....

....or Jesus who is called Christ, who says we are one family, we are one brotherhood

.....and in the sight of God no one
has an advantage over another, no
matter where he lives.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

He is the Easter Christ - - He is God alive!
Put it this way, if you prefer: He is God-in-the-Present-Tense.
He comes to us where we are with His unfailing portion of pardon
and peace, so that we are empowered, that's the right word, and
don't you forget it! - - so that we may persevere with patience
in order that the divine purpose for our lives may be fulfilled
triumphantly. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"FORGIVING AND FORGETTING"
(Matt. 18:23-35)

O GOD, We make so little time to do
this sort of thing, to give some
measure of undivided attention to
the interpretation of Your Word.
That we should make the most of it
now, enlighten us by Your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord,
who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

As this sermon is about to be preached, indulge me as I express some sentiments of a prefatory nature with which you may or may not agree.

There was a time as a youngster when I shied away from church-yards, that is, a grave-yard, a cemetery. But the older I become, that fear and hesitation has disappeared. In fact, to be perfectly honest with you, I find myself occasionally now, more than ever, visiting that grave-yard in my home town where my two parents are laid to rest. I think I do it for at least three reasons:

-- one, while I do remember them at other times, and I do try to give heed to Monica's word, the mother of Augustine, who said, "Care not where my body is laid, but remember me always

before the altar of the Lord" - - that I do respect....

But I do discover that occasionally I have deep thoughts as I do stand where they are buried, and I need to express gratitude for their influence upon my life, specifically.

-- the second reason why I go there, I presume, is because it has a salutary effect on me to know that one day I too shall be as they now are, or as the Biblical expression has it, "They that cannot come to me, but one day I shall go to them...."

There's still another reason, if you don't mind: I've become fascinated by epitaphs. And it's a good thing to visit a cemetery on occasion, to just see what's written on certain tombstones. I've yet to discover the one that I'd like most to read - - it's written on one, carved into stone in a cemetery outside New York City. It has on it only one word . . . the name of the person does not appear carved in stone, nor the birth nor the date of death . . . only one word. And what do you suppose that word is?

....by the way, suppose you were to write your epitaph, and suppose somebody said you're limited to only one word -- what word might you choose? Joseph Baker, the beloved Pastor of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in York, Pennsylvania, a perfectly grand and good person, chose as his epitaph more than one word as he reflected upon life and Life Eternal and his relationship with God and with people....

....looking back across the years, once he had breathed
his last he wanted to be remembered in this way:

"THANK YOU, GOD, FOR EVERYTHING"

....it's a grand and good thing to be able to exit gratefully. Not everyone will.

But back again . . . suppose you were to write your epitaph -- only one word. Whatever you might choose, let me tell you about the word that's written on that tombstone outside New York City --

"FORGIVEN"

...and all thoughts begin to come now, don't they?

-- forgiven for what? -- what was the sin?

-- and against whom? -- and who lies underneath

that tombstone? -- a son?...a daughter?...an errant spouse?

....an embezzler?

one word: "FORGIVEN"

Now hear this passage of Scripture which serves as the basis for all that you're going to hear until this sermon is concluded: the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, beginning with the 21st verse:

" . . . Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord,
how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I
forgive him? till seven times?

Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee,
Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened
unto a certain king, which would take account of
his servants.

And when he had begun to reckon, one was
brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand
talents.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord
commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children,
and all that he had, and payment to be made.

The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped
him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will
pay thee all.

Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him a hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

And his fellow servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellow servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?

And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses. . . . "

It was Peter, you see, who came to Jesus. Peter so often would begin a conversation, or see that someone else would begin a conversation. He was that kind of a person, because he knew a measure of delight in seeing how Jesus might respond to something. In this particular instance he raises a question, and thinks perhaps he'll get a compliment because of the kind of answer he immediately suggests....

" . . . Then came Peter and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? until seven times?"

Peter is quite pleased with himself, and presumably thought the Lord would be pleased with him, because according to ancient Jewish teaching, if somebody offended you, or sinned against you, you forgave him once...two times...three times -- and that was it! Now Peter, hoping to be commended by his Master, said -- "to seven times?" -- going twice the amount of times, you see, he had been taught to forgive....

...as much as to say, "Jesus, see the kind of influence you

have had on my life! -- aren't you pleased? I'm pleased . . . "

And Jesus, as He was wont to do on more than one occasion, jolted Peter and shocked him, by saying, "Not seven times, but until seventy times seven!" -- which is simply to say, There's no end to it -- you just go on forgiving, again and again and again and again, and as long as it's required.

Now listen, let me tell you a story He was a master at that sort of thing -- you know the story, of one who had a tremendous debt, in a certain sense, unpayable. I remember once standing with a member of this congregation who was charged with the responsibility of making good an obligation....and he pleaded with those who brought the charges against him, and I was there when the judge said, "Never in your lifetime will it be possible for you to pay this debt!" He was absolutely right. If he and his wife together had worked day in and day out, the debt was so great that they themselves could not afford to live and even pay the interest on the obligation.

It was that kind of thing, now, that Jesus was talking about. And yet the man said, "Have mercy upon me....have mercy upon me....have mercy upon me - -

don't make me pay the price, don't put me in jail."

....and the man had compassion on him, and he said, "All right, I forgive you."

...and as soon as he was forgiven he went out and he saw somebody who owed him a very insignificant amount, and he grabbed him by the throat and he said, "You've got to pay me what you owe me!"

And the man wasn't able to do it, so he brought charges against him. Then they came back and they told the master what had happened, and the master said, "Shouldn't you have forgiven, even as I forgave you?"

....and then Jesus drives the truth home as forcibly as He possibly can:

" . . . So shall your Heavenly Father do to you if
you from your heart do not forgive everyone his trespasses . . . "

I don't know where you are in your thinking about this whole matter of forgiveness. I know it's the hallmark of the Christian faith and experience, and practice and behavior. I know the distinguishing attribute of being a Christian is love. You are absolutely right when you sing the song: "They will know by the way we love" - - that's the distinguishing attribute! - - and the grandest and best definition you can give for God is: "God is love" . . . and the highest kind of love is forgiving love.

I don't know how well you listen when the liturgy is being sung or interpreted. There's absolutely everything about what we share in the worship experience is meant to be magnificent. As Pastor David turned from the altar and offered that simple prayer as the formal order for our worship, the introduction, was being concluded --

you didn't listen, did you? -- it came and went so quickly. It's called the Collect -- it's a one-paragraph prayer that has a simple and direct thrust in which, presumably, the congregation is assembled and the Pastor in their behalf is saying to God -- "This is the one thing above all else that we want this morning as we come together for worship" . . . and the Church has been praying that prayer from one generation after another -- some of the Collects go back to the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries. That prayer-of-prayers this morning was a simple thing. Let me give you the gist of it:

"Dear Lord, we who have just celebrated the solemnities of the Resurrection are asking You now that the fruits of the Resurrection be made effective in our lives . . . "

....something as simple as all that. Easter isn't meant to be wasted! Whatever Jesus Christ accomplished triumphantly is meant to be accomplished in our lives, and the acme of that, the supreme essence, was when we become forgiving people.

Now I'm going to suggest an experiment for you right now. It may be very, very uncomfortable, it may be the kind of thing that you'd resent having somebody ask you to do . . . quietly now, in your own mind, you think about someone -- see a face, hear a name -- of someone who's offended you, who has sinned against you, and whom you have not forgiven. There's a barrier, there's hostility, there's enmity, as soon as you think of that person's name and as soon as you see that person's faceand it will remain until forgiveness sets in. And there is to be no forgiveness until somebody takes the initiative. Otherwise it remains a stalemate.

Think what would have happened in your relationship and in my relationship with God if God, looking upon us, said, "They're Hell-bent -- I've given them every chance to be different than they are -- I've sent them all kinds of warnings, I've sent them all kinds of teachers, I've sent all kinds of road-blocks on the way to Hell . . . " And God would have said to Himself, " -- and that's the way it is, and that's the way they are -- ! That's it! . . . "

....but God didn't do that.

God took the initiative, sublimely so.

The Scripture has it that 'While we were yet in our sins'

God came to us in Christ to reconcile us to Him.

He didn't wait for us to begin to say, "I'm sorry, I want to be forgiven." Forgiveness is complete only when you become a forgiving person.

Now let me speak very briefly before I walk away from this sacred desk re-

garding this whole business of forgiving and forgetting. I hear you say it -- I myself say it -- "I can forgive, but I cannot easily forget." Why is that true? -- just because we are human. And because we're human, you see, we carry this resentment of the wrong that's been done to us, and we don't give up our resentments easily, and particularly if someone else doesn't do something about it.

I was very fond of her. She had so much going for her, and she still has so much going for her, and I smiled broadly when one day she told me . . . in the early years of her marriage she and her husband had a spat. One of them, I don't know who it was, threw the dish-cloth on the floor, and there it stayed -- for three weeks...four weeks...five weeks . . . and all the time she was harboring this resentment: he won't accept the blame for it, and he was mad at her because she wouldn't take the initiative . . . and it stayed on the floor. One day it was picked up -- and you know who picked it up? -- the mother-in-law! -- "Enough of this! Enough of this!" God bless her, she had lived long enough to know the road they were traveling. She had been there herself before.....this whole business of forgetting and forgiving.

We harbor our resentments, and we nurse them, and we're very comfortable with them and very secure with them. And when they're taken away, what do we have to talk about as far as that person is concerned? And it may take a bit of doing to like the person we don't want to like....and as long as we don't forgive, you see, we don't have to like.

And there is another reason too, I think. We find it difficult to forgive and forget because of our sense of justice -- a wrong has been done, and that wrong has had terrible effect in many places. There was once a woman of this parish who separated from this congregation and joined elsewhere. And then she came back, three, four years later, and she said to me, "Pastor, I have come to ask your forgiveness" . . . and she and I knew exactly the chapter that she had written. And by the grace of God, I take no credit for it, I said to her, "But I forgave you a long time ago!" Which I did. But the one thing I think I should have said to her that I didn't say, "You are forgiven, alright, but you and I have to reckon with the fact that the harm that you did by the hell that you let loose by your innuendos and your subtleties, and the way you intimidated certain people -- that hell still remains -- and I don't know how it will ever be corrected. You and I may have a relationship established, but the harm that's been done has been done."

You remember the simple illustration, don't you, of the woman who came to the

preacher and told about the lies that she had told about the people in the village, and he said, "I'll give you a simple prescription: You get a bag of feathers, and you go and you put a feather on the door-step of every house where you offended or told a lie, and then a couple of days later you go back and try to pick those feathers up" . . . you know exactly what happened -- the wind came, the feathers went, and they could not be retrieved. And I suppose that's one reason some of us find it so hard to forget -- because of the damage that's been done.

Jesus Christ might say, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they do" . . . but the fact remains they still killed Him. There's a member of this congregation for whom I have a very high regard, who when we were concerned about the Iranians and the hostages who were being held, and how we encouraged people every day to come to the Chapel of The Grateful Heart and we encouraged them to pray a measure of forgiveness -- in all honesty he said to me, "Pastor, I will come with my wife while she prays, but I cannot find it in my heart to forgive them, because they knew exactly what they were doing and the harm that was being done to those people -- and to this whole matter of diplomacy throughout the world."

Well, whatever I can say to you as I walk away now, it may be that you can't forget. But the important thing is how you remember. Maybe you can't be as that noble person who said, when somebody said to her, "Don't you remember what that person did to you?" . . . and that person replied nobly, "Remember? -- I distinctly remember forgetting it." . . . now maybe you can't be that noble. But the important thing is how you remember the wrong that's been done. You're blessed indeed if you can remember: I have been forgiven, and only by the grace of God, I might have been that person who has wronged me. For I, too, have feet of clay.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

Addendum: Outlive - or - outlove your enemies.

You can conquer your enemies two ways: outliving them,
or out-loving them.

"SPEAKING OF LONELINESS"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

John 16:37

I do not hesitate to tell you that I am numbered among those who crave solitude. Occasionally I find myself resorting to the study which is for that purpose and for that purpose alone. And when I find myself there I may do several things: one, I may reach for a journal-of-sorts that I've kept across the years in which I have recorded certain things that have made an impression upon me . . . or, I may look around the room and concentrate upon certain mementoes which I have accumulated from time to time, and each one in turn may speak to my particular condition.

Very recently as I sat there in that study I recalled what I had recorded. I'll give you the substance of it briefly:

- the name of the person is of little account....
- the city in which she lived doesn't matter....
- whether she was 70 - 80 - or 90 years of age, quite incidental;
it's enough to know that she was old....
-as I understand it, in the latter part of her life she kept a diary -- the very, very last part of her life. Who gave it to her, how she got it, that too I cannot tell you.....
- Page 1 of that diary read like this: "Today no one came to see me."
- Entry 2 of that diary: "Today no one came to see me."
- Page 3 -- the same words
- Page 4 - 5 - 6 -- the same words.
- When the diary was discovered, Page 7 was the last entry.
- The words were the same except one word had been introduced, a beginning word: "Still today no one came to see me."

They found the diary alongside of her lifeless body. She had died alone....as she had lived in her recent years, in her loneliness.

I want to talk to you this morning about loneliness. What is it, honestly now, to be alone? To be alone is to be cut-off, or to be cut-out, of a relationship. It's as simple as all that.

Now the second thing that I need to bring to your attention is a reference to a memento that's in my study. It's a photograph that was taken by our fellow member Rudy Schuetzler. It was taken more than two decades ago, it was taken at a Sunday School picnic years and years ago. It's a picture of a boy, a youngster, leaning against a tree, with a very pensive look upon his face, a sad look, I dare say. . . .

...I am in duty bound to tell you, the youngster was black. Now remember, will you, this is two decades ago and more, and the story that lies behind that photograph which I do not want to forget is simply this: I was told that one of our members attending the Sunday School picnic, having seen the youngster, went to him and said, "You don't belong here". . .

...the photograph captures it magnificently -- pensive and lonely -- cut-off, cut-out . . . a relationship denied him.

Speaking of loneliness, let it be clearly understood that it is not primarily a matter of age, nor is it a matter of place. A child as well as the elderly can experience it. A person in a crowd no less than a prisoner in solitary confinement can be lonely. Loneliness, let it be said again and ever so often, is a sense of being cut-out or cut-off from others. The well-known American writer Thomas Wolfe has said it and said it very well: "The essence of human tragedy is loneliness." A little-known poet writing about a hundred years ago put it this way: "To every one of us, from time to time there comes a sense of utter loneliness."

Very quickly I'm in duty bound to tell you that as we pass from one level to another, from one age to another, from one stage of living to another, we experience this business of separation, of being cut-off, or cut-out....

...a child can experience it -- you don't usually think of a child being lonely, but a child can be lonely. I remember a number of years ago when he was nothing but a tiny tot -- he sat on the porch at the parsonage at 919 Highland Drive...but bless his soul, he sat on a chair and crossed his legs and put his hands on his chin and said, "Let's talk." . . . and I said, "All right, let's talk" . . . and before I knew it, I'm ashamed to confess it, Winifred and I began talking to each other about things that concerned us, and he rebuked us, the child did, by saying, "But you're not listening to me!" . . . cut-out, and cut-off,

if only momentarily.

...the teenager can experience loneliness, when it's being separated from the childhood that he knew, and the adulthood into which he has yet to emerge -- this awful feeling of being separated . . .

...it can happen to people in middle-age, it can happen to those who experience the empty nest, when there's no longer a teenager at home, and just dad and mother, in an empty nest -- separated from a kind of life that they had known and in which they had been very comfortable . . . -- honestly now -- nostalgia has only to set in, as you may remember what it was to have the little ones around and the growing ones around, no matter how much trial and tribulation . . . now there's an empty nest, and a feeling of loneliness sets in . . .

...and what was that very terrible thing when there loomed upon the horizon what was the troubling economy, and an earnest attempt to set some things in order where bureaucracy is concerned....and every now and then there was a Reduction-in-Force - - to be separated from a job which was yours....

...or which has become increasingly apparent in our society, deterioration between a man and a woman, husband and wife, separation and divorce . . .

. . .the terrible ache that comes in from being cut-off, cut-out -- to wait for the letter that we'll never be getting...to wait for the phone to ring and it won't ring, because a relationship has been severed - - the terrible loneliness, essence of which has been cut-off and cut-out.

And then when death removes the loved one . . . I was only twenty-five years of age when I learned my first lesson about the ache and pain that death can bring when you're separated from a mate. He was old enough to be my grandfather and they had no children . . . and I went up to comfort him after the funeral. And all he could say, God bless him, as the tears streamed down his cheeks, "Pastor, I feel as though I have been cut in two -- as though half of me has been taken away."...the ache and the pain that comes from having been cut-off -- cut-out -- something that

meant so much to you.

This is loneliness. It can happen at any age, it can happen to anyone. And it does.

One of the things I've recorded in my journal-of-sorts that I keep across the years is a statement of an early Church Father -- you have to think a bit about it now when I read it for you --

"The glory of God is when man is fully alive."

. . . now what did the early Church Father mean by that?

God rejoices when a human being, the crowning glory of His creation, becomes completely and perfectly all that he was meant to be! -- and a person as God created him is less than he was meant to be until he learns and masters the art of -- (listen carefully) -- of appreciating himself for what he is in God's sight, and to appreciate the fact that he has a Heavenly Father who cares for him and has a concern for him. You are less than what you ought to be, my friend, you're less than a full and complete person unless you appreciate the fact that you are, that you exist, and you have been created by the hand of God.

A person is less than fully alive until he knows what it is to create, to take a dream and to fashion it until it becomes a reality-of-sorts. By this you and I have been endowed by God! We have this capability. A person is less than what he ought to be in God's sight until he knows what it is to create and to appreciate.

And most certainly a person is less than what he's meant to be in God's sight until he knows what it is to care, to care about himself, to care about the human condition and predicament of man, to have a concern about what's happening to his world, to have a concern about what's happening to other people, those whom he loves and those whom he doesn't quite love. He's less than what he ought to be in God's sight until he knows what it is to care.

And the final thing which I bring to your attention is this: he's less than what he ought to be in God's sight and what he can be until he masters the art of relating -- relating not only to himself and becoming a fully integrated person, until he's mastered the art of relating to God. You use the word religion -- don't use it glibly, don't use it lightly. That word religion from its root meaning means to be bound to, to be held by, to be related to God!

A person is less than what he's meant to be until he's mastered the art of relating to other people, to be able to identify with them. This is what the early

Church Father meant when he said: "The glory of God is when man becomes fully alive" ...the person he was meant to be, and he was never more so than when he knows what it is to relate to his Heavenly Father and to relate to other people as well.

Man is by nature a social person. He's meant to reach out, to touch, to make contact.....not to be cut-off...not to be cut-out. I don't know how you size it up, but the curse that comes upon some of us is when we allow ourselves to be anti-social and deny ourselves the validity of relationship with God and with other people.

I think I need to tell you that I'm very fearful of the age in which we live. Technological advance is not always a blessing. You'll recognize at once that I am of the old school, and unashamedly so. Phillip Slater in his "Pursuit of Loneliness" confirms my conviction. "Americans attempt to minimize, to circumvent or deny the inter-dependence upon which all human societies are based. You may not have recognized that. We Americans seek a private house, a private means of transportation, a private laundry. We have introduced self-service stores. And enormous technology -- witness the computer age -- seems to have set itself the test of making it unnecessary for one human being ever to ask anything of another in the course of going about his daily business." . . . I am frightened when I think of what could lie ahead, especially when they tell me that the day is at hand when you can sit within the confines of your own home and transact your daily business without contacting a single human being.

You don't realize it, my friend, but when that happens you're programming your-self into loneliness, you're conditioning yourself to be insulated and to be isolated from people. And God made us as social beings. We're less than what we ought to be until we know what it is to interact and to know what it is to relate with other human beings. I must remind you now that I'm convinced at times that not all the experiments that take place in science are commendatory. Some can be inhumane, and these I despise. I'm thinking at the moment of one that I brand as downright diabolical . . . I am told it was happening in Nazi Germany, a very strange and unusual experiment...

...when a child was born, it was taken immediately to a room where from that time on it was denied so-called normal human contact. The child in that experiment never knew the benefit of being cradled in the arms of a mother and being rocked, and sung to, and cooed to in the ear, and having a prayer whispered.....the child in that experiment never knew what it was to be fondled, never knew what it was to have its head laid against the shoulder of an adoring father or grandparent or mother....

As you might suppose, as a result of that experiment every single child developed critical and serious disorders -- every one failed to become what it was meant to be as a normal human being.

A curse upon us when we deliberately deny ourselves the possibility of interacting with another person. You and I become -- let me say it as often as I can -- our characters are fashioned, our personalities are developed according to the people to whom we relate. I become according to the people who have loved me. I can also become according to the people who refuse to love me, who ignore me, who look upon me as something less than a person.

You may not remember, but some Christmas Eves ago, when on the night that marked the Holy Nativity I recited a poem for you, an unusual interpretation of the basic nature and character of God....in that poem the poet reminds us of what God is like and what He has done, and how God made the world and all that was in the world....and then He walked away with a troubled look upon His face, and He ruminates to himself and He says, "I'm lonely -- I will make me a man." Even God craves the possibility of interaction and of a relationship.

I was back in the hills of home this past week. I like to go back as often as I can, you can understand -- for a number of different reasons. This last time when I was up there I went with Uncle Karl, the Abraham Lincoln of Hebron Township, as we refer to him with affection....he wanted to show off for me his new electronic banking device. So we drove in the car and we went to the mall and we came up to this little place, this gazebo...he got out of the car -- he didn't have to get out of the car, he could have been where he was . . . he took his little plastic card, he inserted it, he pressed a couple of buttons -- and out came his money...and all of that being done without talking to a single human being.

....knowing Karl as I do, I'm quite certain that he prefers the old way of banking, when as he came back from the bank he could tell me whether the teller had blue eyes or brown!.....

But what's going to happen to us when we can do what needs to be done without having a relationship with a single human being?

For years I subscribed to the British Weekly and remember reading in the British Weekly how when they introduced automation into their post offices over there, there was this little village where the dear old lady went one day and had her first encounter with the automated post office. And as she left the building she was heard mumbling to herself "It may all be very well, but who is there to ask me about my rheumatism?" -- as human as all that! . . . but with technology, you see, you have

a price. 'An enormous technology seems to have set itself a task of making it unnecessary for one human being ever to have to ask anything of another in the course of going about one's daily business.....'

Now listen to this, and recognize it for what it may be worth: "Even within the family, Americans are unique in their feelings that each member should have a separate room, each a separate telephone if possible, each a separate television set, a separate radio, a separate stereo, and if economically possible, a separate car. We seek more and more to prove that it is possible to be alienated and to be separated, and the net result is, we're lonely when we get it. " Let me say it again: we can program ourselves into loneliness -- we can condition ourselves to it becoming an ultimate possibility.

There's a text for this sermon as you speak about loneliness. It's the 32nd verse of the 16th chapter of the Gospel according to John, the words of Jesus Christ:

" . . . I am not alone. My Father is with me. . . . "

...and that kept Him from the ultimate loneliness. The ultimate loneliness is to be separated from God, to be cut-off from God, to be cut-out from God.

The youngster in a Jewish home said to his father, "Why do people go to the synagogue?" The father answered, "People go to the synagogue for different reasons. Now take Garfinkel as an example -- Garfinkel goes because he wants to talk to God."

..."Daddy, why do you go to the synagogue?"

He answered honestly -- not quite as devout as Garfinkel -- he answered,

"I go because I want to talk to Garfinkel."

The two go together -- -- we're less than we ought to be unless we do have a relationship with God, and a relationship with people. The true loneliness is being cut-off and being cut-out -- from people, and from God.

Now before I walk away from the sacred desk I should also remind you that this craving for identification and relating lingers down deep inside every single one of us. Not so long ago when I went to the nursing home where Winifred's mother is -- "Grossmutter" will be 98 one of these days -- I heard something that I had never heard before in a nursing home. I heard a 'click'-'click'-'click' and a 'trot'-'trot'-'trot' and I turned around and behind me was a puppy-dog. It was the dog tag, you see, clicking back and forth against the buckle on the collar and the 'trot-trot-trot', the dog walking down the corridor. Wisely, they had introduced that dog to that nursing home and once the dog had been introduced there were people who had smiles on their faces who hadn't had smiles before. They'd allowed themselves to be separated from other people, but when the dog came and the dog demanded some kind of attention, and they

reached out and the dog would lick their hands -- they began to smile -- a relationship even with a dog can be a very precious thing when a person otherwise feels cut-off or cut-out.

Now, let me tell you this: June Stone has written an article entitled "Make Life More Exciting." As I read it I immediately entitled it: "PRESCRIPTION FOR LONELINESS" and you need to hear it. Says she:

"Now let me suggest a specific way to start a day, preferably before a window in a private place. This may mean rising ahead of the rest of the family, but once you have fought your way out of that cozy bed, it begins to feel like an adventure. Looking out at the dawn say,

'GOOD MORNING, LORD. THIS IS THE DAY WHICH YOU HAVE MADE. I WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT.' (Psalm 118:24)

"Then thank Him for five specific things. Not the same five every morning. Use your imagination. Next, make five requests. These may be for yourself, your family, your friends, or someone you know with a problem. You may want to repeat these requests morning by morning, crossing them off your list as you receive answers or assurance, and adding new ones.

"Now right at the window, before you start your morning activities, pray very reverently,

'I INVITE YOU, JESUS CHRIST, INTO MY LIFE, THIS DAY, TO DO WITH ME AS YOU WILL.'

Then listen carefully all day for any instructions He may have for you. Keep tuned in. He may have errands that only you can do.

"I have asked you specifically to make this early morning contact with your Maker because I believe strongly in the following words of Hubert VanZeller: 'The soul hardly ever realizes it, but whether he is a believer or not, his loneliness is really a homesickness for God' . . . "

And this can be the ultimate loneliness. But God did not make us to be lonely. God made us to respond to the way He is reaching out to us and in the way we're meant to reach out to other people. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from
God our Father and from His
Son Jesus Christ, our Blessed
Lord. Amen.

Mark 4: 40

Let's begin with the sermon quote that appears on the front page of the current issue of Saint Luke MESSENGER, intended to encourage us to anticipate this sermon:

" . . . People study all kinds of things. They are in a position, as a result of their research, to invariably startle us with their findings. Reportedly, as an example, there was that study which concluded that 40% of what the average person fears never happens; 30% of what the average person fears has to do with things that he can't possibly alter; 10% of what the average person fears concerns his health; and the physician who is here worshipping with us at this particular time could tell you that one's health becomes worse as one's fears increase . . . "

Now that's the sermon quote, and here's the sermon title: "WHY ARE YOU AFRAID?"

And here's the passage of Scripture that inspired all that you're going to hear, recorded as the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, an incident in the life of our Blessed Lord as related to His friends, His disciples:

" On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd, they took him with them, just as he was, in the boat. And other boats were with him. And a great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care if we perish?' And he awoke and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!' And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?' And they were filled with awe, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even wind and sea obey him?' . . . "

You'll do yourself a disservice, my friend, if you get hung up as to just how scientifically it was possible for one person to stand

up in a boat and to wave his hand and to have a storm subside, and to have a troubled sea become calm. Some of us repeatedly have had the good fortune to be on the Sea of Galilee, and in all likelihood every time we have been there our guide would at great pain tell us how quickly storms could arise and how a tempest could be created... and how waves could cause ships to float back and forth at the mercy of the storm itself.

I can't tell you scientifically how it happened, I only know that it did! And I'm constrained to say to you with all the strength that my soul can command, my greater interest this morning lies not in the storm that Jesus was able to calm as far as the Lake of Galilee was concerned, wonderful as that miracle could be...but my greater interest lies in the fact that here was a handful of anxious, fearful disciples whom He calmed. And if you have ever tried to calm a troubled person, whose fears are deep-seated, you may understand that that in itself is no small miracle.

Our Blessed Lord for you, of course, it's the way He handles things, He seizes upon an incident to nurture them spiritually. In His every relationship with people His primary concern was: what will you make of it? what can you learn from it? how will you grow by it? And so He makes it His business to preach a sermon to them in one sentence -- an interesting kind of sermon, because it's really two questions, where the second question becomes an answer to the first question, as though He could not trust them themselves to come up with the right answer ---- "Why are you fearful?"

Answer: (by one who is in a position to give the answer
authoritatively -- answer in the form of
another question)

"How is it that you have no faith?"

We are by nature fearful folk, make no mistake about it. You've heard it said repeatedly, we are born into the world with at least two fears: a child is afraid of a loud noise - - that's why we whisper and talk softly in the presence of children, as to not frighten them...

...and a child is always afraid of falling....

We're born that way, you see, of having the bottom come out from under us, and that's why when we support a child - tenderly and with a measure of strength we give to this child assurance that it's not going to be

dropped. And then in the meantime as we grow and develop through the years we acquire all kinds of fears. We're born with only two, but all the others that we acquire!

As a student of history I enjoy every now and then going back and remembering the catch phrases of certain Presidents . . .

-- Wilson's: "The world must be made safe for democracy"

-- Warren Gamaliel Harding: "Let's get back to normalcy"
(whatever that meant)

-- Franklin Delano Roosevelt: "The only thing we have to
fear is fear itself"

...and he told it to us again and again and again. In the dark days of World War II he made that speech that some of you may remember, in which he voiced the hope of millions at that time. We look forward, said he, to a world founded upon four essential freedoms. The first, he said, is freedom of speech....the second: freedom of worship.... the third: freedom from want....and the fourth: freedom from fear. We may be troubled today, reflects one person, as we admit we've made little progress -- toward all of these goals....but only a cynic would dismiss them as idealistic nonsense.

Freedom from fear . . . when Roosevelt spoke those words, as some of you know who bring now the historic perspective to bear, the fear that was in many minds was quite concrete...

-- the knock at the door in the night....

-- the swoop of the secret police....

-- the disappearance of men and women without trace....

That was then. The question remains: is it ever possible to eliminate fear completely?

There is fear that is both personal and global, and we need to talk about that. You have your own personal fears that deal with your past. A chapter in your life has been written, it did occur. It may have been a time of indiscretion, it may have been a time of recklessness, it may have been a time when you excitedly went too far on the wrong road. That is always a possibility. As Pastor David and I were returning from making some calls the other day, from whatever vantage-point God has given to me from these four decades in the ministry, I said, "We must be patient with one another, for at best most of us blunder along the way, and then we look back at the past." By the

grace of God, we may know that we're forgiven, but then there's always the possibility that somebody else discovers that chapter and will never have done with it." We run scared, because of the past.

I watched a television play the other night -- two characters seemingly having a marvelous relationship with each other, and then the one discovers in the life of the other that unfortunate chapter that's over....but it was.....and their relationship from that point begins to deteriorate as she can't quite rid her mind of what had happened in his past.

We have our personal fears as we think of the past.

We have our personal fears as we think of the future -- that high school chum that we knew - why they were sweethearts together, they got married - their marriage lasted 30 years....and then in the 31st year he said to her, "It's all over!" It happened to her. Could it happen to me?

...there was Uncle Henry - never a sick day in his life until that time when he had the stroke, and then, one week led into months and months led into years...paralyzed, unable to speak. It happened to him - could that be in my future?

...then you know your friend, of course you do, who in his early 20's took that job with a family-operated outfit. It seemed so secure....and then after 25 years with them, a son of the grandfather had enough of the business and decides to sell out to a conglomerate, and they moved the corporate headquarters somewhere else, and then he's left out of the picture.....it happened to him, could it happen to me?

And then I become insecure as my personal fear of the future takes over....

-- one has his personal fear of the present...

today at 10:00 o'clock the lab reports in

today -- this afternoon at 3:00 o'clock I have that conference, I have been putting it off, but it's scheduled for today and it can't be re-scheduled...

It's the immediacy of the thing, it's so unavoidable, it's so inescapable, it's there in front of me. The past is over, the future

hasn't yet come. But today. How one dreads it!

Do I speak a language that's alien to you? Do I deal in thought forms that you can't possibly appreciate? I'm willing to believe that if we turned our coming together this morning into a good old-fashioned testimonial meeting, if that were possible, and knowing you as I do, I'd stand by your side and I'd say, "Now trust all these other people who are here -- stand up! Why are you afraid? What is it that you fear?".....and we might be amazed at the way other people allow themselves to become transparent in our midst as they deal with their fears because you yourself might be in the same situation.

Our fears can be very personal.

Our fears also are very global - - we are so inter-dependent upon one another....

...we fear the exhaustion of our natural resources

...we fear the possibility of gas-lines again

...we fear our dependence on one source of energy above all others....

Oddly enough, we have never amassed as much wealth per capita as we have today, and we are looking to read the latest economic indices... we are afraid.

And perhaps you haven't thought of it this way either, but here in America, the United States of America, we have more people going to church than perhaps any other place in the Western world, and you know something - - we fear a moral collapse in our nation! We are a fearful folk - -- personal, global....past, present, future.

Now back to the text, and don't you dare forget it - - said our Blessed Lord, "Why are you afraid?" . . . and then He answered the question - -- "You have little faith."

You may not have thought of it in this way, my friend, but I implore of you to think of it very earnestly in this way - - the opposite of faith is not skepticism.....the opposite of faith is not doubt.....the opposite of faith is fear - - fear in our own inadequacy, fear that other people on whom we depend may not measure up. And maybe I'd better whisper it, every now and then I find on the part of some of you fear that maybe God may not be as good as His promises. And that in itself is a very frightening thing. The opposite of faith is not unfaith, it is fear.

Bertrand Russell used to say that we live in a world where God isn't to be trusted, and he had some people believing it....and no wonder he lived in an age that was crippled by a lack of trust -- in one another, in one's self, and in God.

Well I need to say to you quite parenthetically, any sermon that deals with fear must recognize the fact that there are two kinds of fears - - there is a healthy kind of fear, there is an unhealthy kind of fear. The healthy kind of fear is the kind that gives you a respect for the things that could get you into trouble. Fearfully you keep yourself at a safe distance from those things. To the day I die I'll be indebted to my mother in particular, who taught me to fear certain things. And right now, I don't mind telling you I think it's a healthy thing, sad as I am to admit it, there are some sections of the city, there may be some parts of Silver Spring that I wouldn't want to walk by myself when darkness settles in, and I think that's a healthy kind of fear, given the kind of world in which we live.

...I don't mind telling you, I believe it to be good common sense to take out a policy that protects me against vandalism for the little place that we have in the hills of home, because we live in a world where vandals are loose, and so as a result of my fear that this thing could happen, I protect myself and my interest....

You know what I mean by that kind of healthy fear.

But then there's this unhealthy fear, which constitutes a lack of trust and faith in God Himself. That's what you need to remember when you recall this miracle that occurred, how Jesus Christ was able to calm them when they re-instituted their faith in Him in the realization that they were safe, when they allowed Him to be in control. At most, you see, we are all children, reaching out from our crib in the dark to be held by a hand that's stronger and greater than ours.

This sermon is about to be concluded - not with words of my own choosing - - words far more eloquent than I could hope to muster. But before I conclude the sermon using the words of another, I am in duty bound to remind you that when Jesus Christ was dealing with faith in His relationship with the disciples, it seems to me that only every now and then did He talk about faith in general. But usually He qualified the faith with which He was dealing. You may recognize this now - - He would say to them: "You have little faith" - and take them

to task....or He would commend them and say, "Great is your faith"little faith - - - great faith. I'm sorry to tell you, and I address these words to myself as well as to you - - all too often we dabble in this whole faith business -- a little bit here, a little bit there.....but never quite enough to see us all the way through ...and that's lamentable.

Jesus Christ was always thinking of faith in tremendous terms-- "Be it unto you . . great is your faith." Some of us may never hear that because our faith is little. Now hear this . . . when I saw her last, before last Sunday, she was in the hospital, and I was not very hopeful. I have kept in touch with her. She cherishes her role as a Prayer Partner in Saint Luke Church, and she makes reference to that in her letter. But she was in Saint Luke Church last Lord's Day for the first time in maybe three years

" . . . I wanted to tell you in person last Sunday how grateful I was just to be standing there in Saint Luke and worshipping there once again, but I was so filled with emotion, I could not get the words out . . .

My knowledge that others in Saint Luke are and have been praying for me has helped me bear the pain of the past 26 months. I believe that God chooses

(now does that ever take tremendous faith
to believe that!)

I believe that God chooses some persons to live in pain, to make of them better people. From my own experience I feel that it has helped me grow. I know I have become even more compassionate, more loving and more caring than I was before. Living in pain has taught me a lot. I developed my own formula which for me has proved to be unfailing. This is how I have handled it.

1. Pray - almost without ceasing - on your knees, when you can
2. Live close to God
3. Have courage
4. Replace anxiety and fear with a calmness of your mind
5. Become involved with the lives of others, especially those who are hurting more than yourself
6. Pray . . . pray . . . pray

Where once my pain was constant and almost unendurable - I now receive periods of relief and what remains is now endurable. When I receive these periods of relief, you can believe I give thanks on my knees. When it gets real bad, I don't go to bed, instead I start baking, cooking, cleaning and polishing.

People have asked me -- How can you do all the things you do? How did you become so strong? I tell them it all happens through faith in Jesus Christ -- you only have to move aside and let God take over. I have been given strength I never dreamed of regaining and I received it through tremendous faith- - - a little is not enough. This I believe.

When I walked into Saint Luke last Sunday, my husband said to me, "You forgot your cane," I replied with a smile, "I don't need it -- HE has my hand. . . ."

Now take her word for it, as she says, "This I most certainly believe."

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO HONOR YOUR FATHER AND YOUR MOTHER"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Exodus 20:12

Permit me to do something this morning that I have seldom done in all the years that I have been privileged to be your Pastor and stand at the sacred desk: I'm about to set aside the sermon that I'd prepared to preach on this day, and what you are about to hear has been crystallized in my soul in the last several hours as I remind myself constantly, as well you should remind yourself, that this day is set aside in the celebration of the Christian Home.

How it may be with you I don't quite know, but as for myself, I seldom if ever think of my home without thinking of two people in particular who made it a home -- my father and my mother. There's a text, of course, for what you're about to hear, it's rooted and grounded in Scriptures -- a text that has gripped my soul again and ever so often, from the Book of Exodus, this is the 20th chapter, these words specifically -- you will recognize them:

"Honor thy father and thy mother."

Life has been pictured in many ways. For our purpose this morning let me picture life for you as a group photograph, and just as your parents and my parents when they saw a group photograph that we brought home from school would look eagerly just for your face or for my face, because that's the one that mattered most -- in a certain sense life is a group photograph in which now I scan the photograph in front of me, and of all the people who could have appeared in that group photograph, I'm looking for two people particularly -- my father and my mother. For none have influenced my life as much as the two of them.

God ordained, when He was dealing with the Children of Israel, that there should be no question about it -- children should honor their parents and give them the respect that belongs to them. As I honor my parents this morning in your presence, I thank God that I can. Not everyone is that fortunate.

Occasionally I find myself in conversation with strangers, the waitress who served us, or the person whose duties require that he attend us, whatever his ministry may be....and as I have occasion to talk with that person, I remember how frequently I've said -- of course not ever having met that person before, and yet in

a somewhat uninhibited manner I'd say, "You must have had a wonderful mother!" ...and would you believe me, like as not they say, willingly, cheerfully, "I sure did!" But once I was sorry, very sorry, that I put that question to a person, for when I said to her, "You must have had a wonderful mother!" - she replied very honestly, "I wish that I could say that I had." . . . not everyone can say that, unfortunately, not everyone can say it. But for those of us who can, we should. And whether we articulate it in words or not, the fact remains that we are in duty bound to thank God for those who left their indelible stamp upon the fabric of our souls.

It's the kind of thing that God had in mind from the very beginning, for the crowning glory of creation is man, the human being. Understand that and understand it well - - there is nothing, absolutely nothing more wonderful than a human being - - at least that's the way God intended it to be. For God stamped a human being in His likeness and gave him capability of the potential to reach out for the divine. And there isn't anything more wonderful than that, to be able to think the thoughts of God!

. . . and then God said to a human being, and to a man and woman in particular, "I'll place in your care a child." . . .

We've established the custom, and I hope it may continue here in Saint Luke for years to come, although I'd not lock anybody into a particular pattern that means much to me - - but in recent years when a child has been baptized and named for Jesus Christ, the officiating minister having cradled that child in the crook of his arms, returns the child to the parents, and in doing so he speaks these words fervently - - "God smiles upon us in many ways - never more so, perhaps, than when He places into our life and into our love the soul of a child. And as long as we live we have no greater responsibility." Of all the responsibilities that God has given to people, and to those who have the good fortune to be parents, none is greater than to fulfill the obligation that rests upon them to care for the child who is placed into their life and into their love.

And as this sermon unfolds this morning, I am thanking God for two people who did not fail in the responsibility which God entrusted to them. "Honor thy father and thy mother" ---- that's what the Good Book says, one of the Ten Commandments. I'm fortunate, I can honor them. And I honor them specifically for what they did for me by teaching me respect for God.

My father was an immigrant, as many of you know. He came to these shores at 18 years of age. He was on a steamer for three weeks before he arrived at Ellis

Island. He borrowed \$200.00 to get him here, and the first \$200.00 that he earned he sent back home.

My father would have been classed as an illiterate person. The only thing he could really read and write was his own name. He worked hard, but he didn't amass much wealth - - I don't mind telling you, after he and Mother died, after the two of them died, among the six of us, each of us was left about two or three thousand dollars - - not very much, of course, for a lifetime of work. But what they did leave to us cannot be measured in dollars and cents, and I'd not attempt to put a price tag upon it. My father taught me a great deal about common sense, and I'm indebted to the fact that he gleaned that common sense from what he read in his Bble.

He had an Arabic Bible. It was given to him by a person in the States shortly after he was naturalized as a citizen. And I have a very precious recollection of being seated alongside of him -- he couldn't read English, but he could read his Arabic. He'd ask me to get my English Bible, as a youngster, and then with a great deal of fumbling and faltering, I'd finally understand what he was trying to tell me and I could find the comparable passages in my Bible. And would you believe it, he delighted in the Old Testament, and his favorites were King David and King Solomon. I suppose the passage to which we referred more often - and he seemed to be equally excited every time we dealt with it - was that passage in the First Book of Kings, that tells about Solomon and his encounter with two mothers.....

...both of them gave birth to a child at the same time, and both of them lived in the same neighborhood. One night the one mother, tossing in her sleep, suffocated her child, and when she realized the terrible thing that had happened, for some unexplainable reason she got up and grabbed the dead child, and went over to the place where the other woman was sleeping - I suppose another tent or a nearby house in those days....and she took that mother's live child and replaced it with her dead child. In the morning when that woman got awake she discovered a dead child alongside of her.....it occurred to her that what had happened had been this dastardly thing on the part of this other woman, and she sought her out and argued with her - - they could reach no understanding . . . and then someone took them to the

wise Solomon - - he would make the decision as to who would care for the live child.....

.....Solomon in all his wisdom asked his servant to bring a sword, and he said, "Now, I will cut this baby in half, and to one mother I will give half and to the other mother I will give half, and so I shall make the decision."

...and the one mother, more so, much more so than the other mother, vehemently protested, and Solomon said, "You are the real mother, for you desire more than anything else life for this child."

...and that's the acid test. The real father, the real mother is always the person who wants life for the child. The best possible kind of life.

I remember perhaps the second or third year in my ministry, a woman came to me and said, "I'd like you to baptize my child but my husband has no enthusiasm for baptism. Perhaps you would come some evening and the three of us could talk about the meaning of baptism." I was able to fulfill that obligation and I went to the home and we talked and we talked . . . and seemingly I wasn't making as much headway as I would like to have made, until it occurred to me that I would put to both of them: "In the final analysis, what is it you think most you should give to this child?" . . . and they talked about a college education, they talked about certain basic values, they talked about food, shelter, clothing, that sort of thing, and a good name.....

...and then with all the strength that my soul could command, I said, "How about introducing this child to the fact of God - - now you think, could anything be of greater worth than that?"

Introducing the child to the fact of God is life in the ultimate, for in the final analysis that is really what matters most - my relationship to God. Make no mistake about it.

I honor my father very easily this day, for the regard that he taught me for the Good Book. Oh incidentally and quite parenthetically, you ought to know, I don't have that book any longer - - someone else has it. On the day when your Associate Pastor was ordained as a Minister of the Word and Sacrament, what was it that I could place in his hands - - a newly ordained minister . . . I gave him that book that my father had given to me. He'll not be able to read it in Arabic, but he'll remember the stock from which he stems, and the grandfather who had a high and holy regard for the Word of God.

It was Luther, you see, who maintained that we should regard the Scriptures

as highly as we do because the Scriptures are the cradle of Jesus Christ, the Scriptures give us Jesus Christ, and he's set aside to give people Jesus Christ.

I told you I honor my father because of his regard for the Good Book, and also for his common sense and his integrity and his honesty. For what it may be of value to you, can you understand why my heart was gladdened when a college president once wrote me about a man that he had met who knew my father, and that man said to the college president that my father was one of the most honest men he had ever met.

I say to you without any hesitation, that is a legacy that I will prize to the very day that I die. Says the Good Book, "Honor your father and your mother" ...so I pay tribute to my father.

Says the Good Book, "Honor your father and your mother" - - my father taught me regard for the Good Book, my mother taught me to pray, much more so than any other person. I've told some of you, haven't I before? - she was a devout Roman Catholic, she was a teenage bride. My father was a pedlar who went around from place to place selling handkerchiefs, shoe-laces - - two satchels banded on either side by that leather strap over his shoulder - - sometimes he'd be gone for weeks. And while he'd be absent my mother would pray for him and she'd pray for God to help us while he was away. I should have brought it to you - it's hanging on the wall behind my chair where I'm seated at my desk in the office that I have here at the church, just a few steps away from this pulpit. It's a picture, it's a lithograph, it's not very good art - - it's a picture: Jesus Christ, standing at the door and knocking. Devout Roman Catholic that she was, she had to have a focal point whenever she would think of God and she'd come to pray, and that's where she'd gather us kids, as a mother hen her chicks. It was at my mother's knee that I learned to pray.

"Honor thy father and thy mother" . . . happy indeed is that person who can give thanks to God for what he received from two people more than any other people, a regard for the Good Book and to be taught to pray.

It occurred to me some time ago that each of us has a way of remembering certain sentences that are pregnant with meaning. Who said it I cannot tell you, but you and I become according to the people who love us . . . or the people who refuse to love us. I thank God for two people in particular who loved me in the formative years of my life.

There are four questions that I put to people who come to me to be married. One of the questions that I most certainly include: How do you feel about chil-

dren? - - and I deal with that one very earnestly as I do the others as well. And I've lived long enough to know that sometimes pregnancy sets in long before you may have desired it. Children are not always botn at a convenient time. And in this day when it's so easy not to have children, I find myself in duty bound to say to the couple in front of me -- when pregnancy does set in, let there be no question in your mind, you're going to love that child. God is love, and g loves us . . . and is there anything more precious in the human scene, when love is channeled into the life of a child - by those who are in a position to first give love to that child?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT DOES IT MEAN?"

QUIET OUR MINDS, AND hush our hearts,
O God, and make us fit to give some
measure of undivided attention to the
interpretation of Your Word, Through
Jesus Christ Thy Son, our Lord, Who
when He came, came preaching. Amen.

Act 2:12

As I stand now at the Sacred Desk, there are two things that I'm about to ask from you. One is that you listen very carefully to something that I want to read for you. Then I'll tell you the second thing that I'll be asking from you, once you have heard what's about to be read:

" . . . When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were amazed and wondered, saying, 'Are not all these who are speaking Glileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians, we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.' And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others mocking said, 'They are filled with new wine.' . . . "

Now you've already done the first thing that I'm about to ask of you, to listen carefully to what's been read. Now the second thing is, how would you tell this to somebody else? How would you explain what you've just heard? In the ten or twelve minutes allotted to me for the preaching of this sermon I'm about to attempt the impossible, to explain what in a certain sense cannot be explained -- it can only be experienced. But I shall not shirk my responsibility. By the grace of God I'll do the best I can.

Forty-nine days had come and gone. This was the fiftieth day now, when a group of people remembered something they'd been told. They were told by someone whom they called Master and Lord to stay where they were, to stay together, antici-

pating something wonderful that had been promised them. The fiftieth day came. As the Scriptures have it: "They were all with one accord in one place" -- and then it happened! -- they tried to explain and to describe what it was that happened. Something hit them. And their immediate reaction was -- your reaction presumably -- what was it?

They tried to use certain words. We have to use only the words that have some value for us as we try to describe something . . .

" . . like the rush of a mighty wind that filled
the whole room! . . . "

...that means it was explosive and comprehensive....

...I have a bit of trouble with this one --

" . . like tongues of fire hovering over people's heads . . . "

Well, let me get on with it.

In the Calendar of the Church there are days that are quite unlike any other day, Christmas as an example. No other day quite like Christmas because on Christmas, remember, God did something that He'd never done before, and He did it uniquelyHe came to earth in human form.

Last night when we had our public examination for those who are anticipating Confirmation this afternoon, I was thrilled when one youngster answered this question: Why did God come to us in human form? -- he answered it perfectly:

" -- because He loved us....

-- because He wanted to come to us where we are....

-- because He wanted to relate to us....

-- because He wanted to show us how to live....

-- because He wanted to take our place, that
our sins might be forgiven.....

-- because He wanted to show us how to get to Heaven . . . "

Christmas . . . you have some measure of appreciation for what it means, of course you do . . . Good Friday -- another day that's unique in the Calendar of the Church, no other day quite like Good Friday -- the Baby became a Man, and the Man was put to death -- He died a tragic death, He died a death for which He volunteered, so that our sins might be taken away....with some degree of appreciation we can understand how it happened because we have had enough brush with people who can be cruel and inhumane, and even spit in the face of God! We've lived long enough to know that there can be people like that! And we've lived long enough to know that God does not retaliate, so we have some measure of appreciation for Good Friday.

Then there was Easter Day - - - a day quite unlike any other day, a day when a grave was left empty and then people began to say - - "He is here! - - He is here! - - He is here! - - He is not there, He is here!" - - the Invincible One who conquered death.....

...and haven't we lived long enough to know that love is stronger than hate? -- we've seen evidence of it....

...haven't we lived long enough to know that Life Eternal is stronger than death by Satan? - - yes, we have.....

So with some degree of appreciation we can understand Easter. But Pentecost? -- a tremendous day, really, and you and I are here as one of the results of it. But how do you explain it? Let me do my best, let me say it again, and surprise you, perhaps, in the way that I'll handle it for you.

What does it mean? What happened?

Well those people who had gathered together and stayed in one place were not always strong in their faith, they were the ones who had denied Him, they were the ones who had forsaken Him. None among them had ever come forward and said, "He was my friend!" None of them had come forward at the time of trial and said "Let me speak a good word in His behalf - - I volunteer as a witness!" . . . none of them had ever spoken like that! They had all denied Him and forsaken Him, and ran away. And now they were living together for 49 days. Surely the hostility must have surfaced again and again, because when something wonderful happens and you know that you were not part of that, and you could have been part of it, and you begin to feel guilt-stricken, and you begin blaming other people to ease your own guilt feelings and surely that must have happened in those 49 days.

But when the 50th day came, they were empowered by the Spirit of God, they became God-inebriated, they became God-intoxicated - - that's exactly what happened! To put it for you as clearly as I can, they became completely God-conscious, as much as any human being can. They allowed God to take over -- that's what Pentecost means! -- a group of people together, who with one mind and one spirit allowed God to take over, and they became infused by His Spirit.

I have lived long enough to see any number of people infused by a spirit that is not always salutary, that is not always commendatory. We have a way of being filled by hate, by hostility, by prejudice, by ill will - - we can be filled by many things, but these people were filled by God!

I remember when I first went to Europe, not long after World War II - - I was in the ancient city of Prague, the Golden City, and at that time when I was there,

there was the first international gathering of the Communistic world - - some 35,000 representatives of the Communist block were gathering for the first time since the cessation of hostilities. The city was alive with their spirit.....and I remember being in one garden in particular when Marshall Tito appeared - - and as with one voice, in staccato-fashion they were infused with the spirit of Stalin and to as together they said: "Stalin-and-Tito!

Stalin-and-Tito!

Stalin-and-Tito!

Stalin-and-Tito! . . . "

....they were infused by that spirit.

And I reflected in my own mind and say that those people now, in recent years, have made decisions that have affected the entire world as they were committed to Stalin, to a man named Tito.

What does Pentecost mean? - - a group of people committed to Jesus Christ and infused by His Spirit.

What happened at Pentecost? - - these people began to speak to one another, they began to speak with one another. There is nothing unusual about that, is there? A lot of people speak to one another, a lot of people speak to one another. But what they say is not always beneficial, and what they say may not always be truthful, and what they say may not always be kind. But when these people spoke with one another, they spoke as the tongue of Jesus Christ - - and that makes all the difference in the world! That's what happened at Pentecost! -- they began speaking with one another in the language of love and truth - - they began speaking, if you please, in the language of God! And that's no small thing.

Today we celebrate the Birthday of the Christian Church. And what is the Christian Church? - - people drawn together by the Spirit of God, to be in the world today as Jesus Christ. That's precisely who you are, you ought to know your identity. You are to be as Jesus Christ. And on the day of Pentecost the Spirit of God possessed the people, they became to one another as Jesus Christ.

Last evening in Bieber Hall, before we came up for the Public Examination, I was deeply moved when I heard the Vice President of this Congregation, who's been a project director of NASA, involved in the satellite and the launching of what has been and what soon will be again . . . unashamedly, without any reluctance whatsoever, he spoke of his commitment to NASA and of his willingness to be faithful to his assignment. But then in the same breath he said, "It was thirty years ago that I made a commitment to Jesus Christ, and I fervently endeavor to be faithful to

that commitment."

Pastor David has already made reference to the fact that this afternoon when the confirmands walk this sacred aisle, we'll turn and greet them -- we who have some track record in the Christian Church, we who will be to them as Exhibit A. Will they see in us something of the Spirit of Jesus Christ?

I think of Lorraine, for whom we will have the service tomorrow morning, and to all intents and purposes what I'm about to say to you now could constitute a requiem for Lorraine. She was different. She was a character. And I remember how she'd stand and look at me, draw up very close, almost embarrassingly so, with those thick lens of hers, to look at me, and I ask myself now when I recall how she'd look at me, -- did she see upon my face lines of love? Did she read on my face a measure of compassion? The Christian Church is meant to be in this world as Jesus Christ. That's what Pentecost is -- God taking over your life and my life really. You can explain it in terms as simple as these.

Now before I walk away from the Sacred Desk, I'm not at all embarrassed to tell you that I make much of anniversary occasions. The older I become, the more I make of the anniversary of my birth. And I thank God for those who brought me into this world and gave me life. And I ask myself on the anniversary of my birth, as I do at other times, what am I making of it?

....it will be 43 years this week since I was ordained
a Minister of the Word and Sacrament....and I recall my
ordination, I make much of that anniversary in my own way....
....I remember as an impressionable youngster of twelve years
when I was confirmed and committed myself to Jesus Christ....

I'm inviting you to do likewise as you make much of the anniversary of your Confirmation -- think of it now, as best you can. Go back across the years to that church where it happened, where in whatever way it took place, there was no question about it, you were saying "Yes" to Jesus Christ.

You'll forgive me if I tell you, I don't always make the most of the promise that I made. We have a Saviour who comes back again and again and puts His arms around us and claims us in the face of our sinfulness. I'm inclined to think you are in the same situation. You have not followed Him perfectly. That's why every now and then we have to do what we're going to do now -- make the promise all over again. If that's your frame of mind, would you answer with these words: "I promise again!"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

From the Gospel according to John, the first chapter:

" . . . There was a man sent from God whose name
was John . . . and this is the word of John,
he confessed and denied not, but confessed,
I am not the Christ . . . they asked him then,
Who are you? . . . "

Who was Lorraine? How well did you know her? So much that we didn't know
about her.

- her middle name was Elizabeth...
- her father's name was Albert...
- the family name was Swanson...

When was she born? Where? -- she was born in Iowa...

When was she born? -- 80 years ago.

Who are you? That's the question they put to John the Baptist, because John
the Baptist was different. He didn't wear conventional clothing, he didn't dress
exactly as other people did, he was not precisely a conformist.

.....paraphrasing as you can see, there was a person come from
God whose name was Lorraine. Lorraine was different. She didn't
always dress as other people dressed. As John the Baptist's dress
was unusual, so was her dress unusual.

John the Baptist was different: he was pretty much of a loner, and he didn't
always eat as other people ate.

.....Lorraine was at times something of a loner, and she didn't
always eat as other people ate. Lorraine was different.

They put the question to him: Who are you?

He said, "I am not the Christ."

.....I once put the question to Lorraine -- "Who are you, Lorraine?"
and Lorraine answered, "I am not a saint."

That's why we're here this morning. We ask ourselves the question from time

to time, who are we? and how different are we? and what is the nature and the character of that difference? and in the sight of God, who are we?

Lorraine could be basically honest -- painfully honest, never for a moment willing to hide her feelings. She had a measure of respect for the Cloth, and yet her tongue could be sharp, but nonetheless honest . . . "I'm not a saint."

When Lorraine first came to us, I presume some fifteen years ago, she walked up this sidewalk. I happened to be standing in the corridor and I saw her through the glass-enclosed porch. She was different -- and for shame upon myself, my first question as I recall was, I wonder who she is? . . . and I wonder what she wants? -- because as is true for so many of us, we brand people immediately and we cast them into an image, and I thought she was just another bag-woman coming for a hand-out.

Well, you need to know this, when Lorraine came for the very first time, she came because she wanted something. But not for herself. Her very first request of me was this: "Would you be willing to come and see my sister? -- she's bedridden, and I live with her, and I serve as a kind of a nurse." -- you got it, didn't you? -- her very first request was for something, but not for herself.

Let me be equally painfully honest with you, there are any number of people that I know, who when they come to Saint Luke's, they want something, they want something for themselves. They want to draw the benefit from what we offer in Youth Ministry....they want it for their youngsters because they can't give it as well as they should they want to draw the benefit from Music Ministry, they want to draw the benefit from Drama Ministry, they want to draw the benefit from Christian Education.....they want to draw the benefit from a church that has a ministry to persons with special needs. There are people who when they come, they want for themselves. And I'm not speaking disparagingly of that because the church is the only institution on the face of the earth that exists primarily for people who are on the outside and who need to be given. But to the everlasting credit of Lorraine, when she came, she didn't ask primarily for herself, but for somebody else. She came to get for somebody else.

Eventually people saw in John the Baptist the image of God. I stem, as you know, from Middle-Eastern stock. The name for God in the Arabic world is Allah. There's an old proverb that comes out of the Middle East that has to deal with something like this: no scrap of paper, no matter how small nor worn, is insignificant as long as on it the name of Allah can be written.

Lorraine came to us as a bit of God. And how does God come to us?

He came to us in the form of Jesus Christ, and was placed in the arms of Mary, and was placed in the arms of Joseph, with needs to be met. Did it ever occur to you that God makes overtures to us in that way? -- not always coming to us in regal splendor, not always coming to us with trumpets before Him, not always coming with banners unfurled, not always coming in marvelous vestments. They were shocked -- that's why they couldn't recognize Him when He came at the very beginning as a baby....because it never occurred to them that He would come in such a humble way, with so much need to be met from the very beginning . . .

-- from the very beginning Jesus Christ had to be fed,
to be bathed, to be enveloped in love....

There was a person come from God. Her name was Lorraine.

During the course of this week and before it ends I will have the good fortune to conduct a retreat in the Cardinal Spellman Retreat Center outside New York City. Aside from the responsibilities that I'll have to assume, I will make time to sit quietly in the chapel. And you need to know that when I sit there I will think of how the chapel is used by devout Roman Catholics.

....there has been a period of time in the Roman Catholic Church when they had what they called the Adoration of the Host. Now if you're not familiar with Catholic teaching, be patient with me while I explain it to you: the devout Catholic honestly believes that Jesus Christ is present in that piece of bread, and the very, very spiritually sensitive will come and sit, sometimes by the hour, and face in the direction of the Host, and meditate and concentrate upon Jesus Christ.....and as they sit and meditate and concentrate upon the fact that He's there in that piece of bread -- now follow me closely -- after so many hours are given to such veneration and adoration, they celebrate the Holy Communion, and that piece of bread is broken, and it's given to the people who are present, and they receive that piece of bread which represents the Body of Jesus Christ. . . . there was a man of God who once said to the waiting people who came to receive the Sacrament, and very properly so, "For hours, now, you have been meditating upon the Christ who is in that piece of bread -- as of this moment now that piece of bread will enter into the body of your friend and your neighbor who is here alongside of you. Can you, will you now adore the

Christ who dwells in this person and in that person?"

So God gave us the opportunity to recognize the Christ of Lorraine, in her need to be loved, to be recognized as a person. God has a hunger, too, to be recognized for who He is. God hungers for love. God hungers for recognition.

You should know, and very properly so, that when we got the news of Lorraine's death and Pastor David went immediately, responding to Alice Kathryn Shoe's call, that from the moment that we learned of her death we never thought of anything other than the kind of thing we're doing right now. We could have settled for any number of other different arrangements for her funeral. But it never occurred to us that there were such possibilities. We always thought of doing it the way we are doing it now. And as you heard Pastor David say yesterday, we were her family!

As I walk away from the Sacred Desk you should hear this: when Lorraine first came to us, she came to get something to give to somebody else. Ten years ago she made her will. I don't have a copy in front of me. But you will be pleased to know that at least one of you here witnessed the signature that she applied to that will. After she made perfectly plain that all of her debts would be cared for, whatever remained she wanted Saint Luke Church to have. It may be \$5,000....it could be \$10,000 - - that's not the important thing.

...the important thing is that she came to us
in order to get, to give to somebody else....

....and as she makes her exit now, to hear the trumpets sound as the Gates of Heaven open, she says, "You can have it - - use it wisely and use it well."

* * *

(transcribed as recorded)

"MAN IN THE MIDDLE"
(Book of Philemon)

GRACE, MERCY and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

We had been engaged in casual conversation, touching on various and sundry matters, when he introduced what I suppose would be tantamount to his prescription for a successful marriage. He told us how on his wedding night he sat his bride down on the bed and looked her straight in the eye and said, "Now there are two things that I require of you: one, you will not overdraw my bank account; and the second thing: you will never put me in the middle."

It's to this latter thing to which I invite your attention now. For sooner or later each of us may find himself being put in the middle by someone. It's something that goes on all the time, and it can happen very easily, quite accidentally, but at the same time very deliberately.

Children have a way sometimes of putting one parent in the middle as over against the other one -- really they can do that....

...grandchildren can do that -- they may put their grandparents in the middle as over against their relationship with them and their own parents . . .

-- do I have to apply it for you, where you work? -- that person who works at the next desk, alongside of you, may by deliberate design pit you in the middle as over against her and the superior that both of you have in common . . .

It goes on, this whole business of putting someone in the middle.

We preachers are quite uncomfortable when we discover that some of our members sometimes, either by quoting or misquoting us, will exploit a relationship with us and put us in the middle as they desire to build up their own defences against somebody else.

Well now it's one thing to be put on and be placed in the middle, as over against an individual who may choose the middle course. As an example, here's this ever-popular

newsletter that goes out from a very reliable source. The one that just came to my desk yesterday begins in this manner -- usually it deals about economic things, but this one begins: "This goofy weather will last through the whole summer . . ." and then they provide the basic information for that justification by quoting the weather people. And what do the weather people say? -- now listen to this:

" . . . in some sections it will be hotter,
 in other sections it will be cooler....
 . . . in some parts of the country it will be wetter,
 in other parts of the country it will be drier . . . "

Now you have to become adept to run a middle course just like that. And some people do it deliberately.

There was that dear lady in a parish church in England who was heard to complain to the Vestry that " . . . that what this church really needs is a one-handed preacher, because I'm sick and tired of going to church and hearing the preacher say, 'On the one hand, this . . . and on the other hand, that' "

....now that's what you call putting yourself in the middle by deliberate design.

But I am not talking about that kind of a middle person. All that I'm saying to you now is inspired, and justified, by a passage from Scriptures. There are 66 books in the Bible, you know, some of them much longer than others. This is one of the shorter books. In fact, it's a letter, a private letter and a personal letter. It's found on one page, it consists of 25 verses. I encourage you to read it before sundown tonight, really I do. For your edification, it can be read in little more than two minutes and twelve seconds. It's called the Letter to Philemon. It was written by a man named Paul about a man named Onesimus. Let me fill you in right now.

Let me remind you again, it's a letter, a very personal letter. To all intents and purposes it reveals what happens when a man is put in the middle, and that's exactly what Onesimus is doing, he was putting Paul in the middle, between him and Philemon.

But having said that to you, I need now to rise to my full stature and make perfectly plain to you that every now and then you have to ask the question: What does a Christian do in any given circumstance, and specifically for our purpose now, what does a Christian do when he finds himself in the middle?

Well, a Christian does what he's meant to do under any condition or circumstance: he fulfills his commitment to Jesus Christ, he commits himself honorably in his allegiance

to the Lord. Now let me say that again: in whatever condition or circumstance a Christian may find himself, he has no alternative except to faithfully obey the Lord. Now to the everlasting credit of Paul, when he finds himself being put in the middle, he does the Christlike thing. And you and I are not always inclined to do that, for any number of reasons.

Now - - three people: Philemon - Onesimus - Paul.

Philemon became a convert to the Christian faith. God saw fit to use this wandering tent-mender-turned-preacher, a man named Paul, to introduce Jesus Christ to Philemon. Philemon, you ought to know, was a very wealthy man, and he placed his wealth and his resources at the disposal of his new-found faith - - he established a church in his home, and he had the support of his wife Apphia and of his son Archippus - - a very happy situation. Now that's Philemon - - a new convert to the Christian faith, he lived in Colossae . . .

-- he said to his friends, "You come, we'll make our house a church, a chapel."

...Apphia said, "Great!"

...Archippus said, "Count me in!"

...and Paul could think of him, as he said in the letter, as a "fellow soldier in Jesus Christ."

Now you ought also to know that, being a wealthy man, he had servants. In the time of the Roman Empire there were 60 million people in servitude, whose lives were not their own. They were held in bondage by their masters. Now, one of the servants that Philemon had was a man named Onesimus. Now what can I tell you about Onesimus? Not very much. I'll have to ask God to give me a sanctified imagination to help fill in some of the data. But this is true: Onesimus ran away from Philemon.

Now this goes on all the time too, whether you think of it psychologically, philosophically, or even from a practical standpoint - - people are always running away from something, or from someone. Now I say to you quite earnestly, this running-away business isn't too bad as long as you run to someone whose value judgment you can respect. When you run to someone as you run away from something, or someone, if that person, then, can fulfill his or her obligation to Jesus Christ to serve as a reconciling agent or a stabilizing influence - - so much the better.

Now...Onesimus had been a slave. Now be patient with me as I try to picture the situation - - and I think we're in duty bound, by the grace of God, to picture as best we can how it might have happened. You see, Philemon was all excited about his new Christian experience. He invited his friends and neighbors to come....

....and they'd sing

....and they'd make music

....and they'd have their wonderful meal together

and they'd have their prayer sessions and their preaching sessions....

but some of this, evidently, may not have turned Onesimus on because he had to do all the chores -- he had to bring the water in, you see, from the well....

-- he had to go to the market-place and to the bazaar
to get the food

-- he had to prepare the food....

And all the while these other people were making the most of the time that Philemon had as he invited them to come. And it could well be that Onesimus, being very human, that he said, "I've had it!" . . . and not being a Christian himself, coped out, ran away.

Or who knows, I'm not very happy about bringing this to your attention as a possibility: but who knows, maybe Onesimus got the dysentery, that dread amoeba, became very ill....and Philemon was so caught up with his new-found religion, arranging for meetings, studying his Sunday School lesson, that he paid no attention to his servant who was ill. And maybe Onesimus said on that basis: "I've had it!" Who knows? It could have been that way, because in some places that's the way it is today.

....or maybe some civil rights leader came to Colossae and found the conditions of Onesimus's servitude and said, "You don't have to put up with this! -- You're entitled to so many other benefits that you're not getting!"and maybe Onesimus became very dissatisfied -- again -- "I've had it!"....off he goes.

So he runs away to Rome, the big city -- easy to get lost, perhaps, in the big city. But who knows now, be careful, who knows -- he remembered there was this Christian named Paul.

I'm going to introduce this element, because I can picture some of you as Paul might have been, in the situation in which Onesimus found himself. I would like to think that when Paul visited Philemon, he paid attention to Onesimus, patted him on the back -- "You are doing good work, Onesimus, it's not easy, but it's necessary. Thank you." . . . and maybe he never forgot it as he remembered Paul. But at any rate, in God's plan, Onesimus runs to Paul, and Paul hears him out. And Paul now finds -- get it carefully, get it in focus -- Paul finds himself in the middle. For Philemon was his friend.

Now what does a Christian do when he finds himself in the middle of a situa-

tion like that? A Christian does the only thing that a Christian is meant to do, and that's the Christlike thing. So Paul sits down earnestly and talks to Onesimus about Jesus Christ!

-- he doesn't say, "I'm terribly disappointed in Philemon . . ."

-- he doesn't say, "I thought better things of Philemon, I can't possibly understand how Philemon would allow a situation to exist where you would find it convenient or necessary to run away! I can't believe that Philemon would fall from grace like that!"

Ah, you don't find Paul talking like that.

And he doesn't berate Onesimus, he doesn't belittle him. But he talks to him about Jesus Christ and Onesimus becomes a convert! Paul exploits -- and I say it magnificently -- his role as a middle man, to the glory of Jesus Christ.

Onesimus blossoms so beautifully, for whatever time he spends with Paul, Paul would like very much to keep him. But Paul, still the middle man, knows he has to fulfill his role as a middle man to the glory of Jesus Christ, and he says to Onesimus -- "You've got to go back to your master." -- and as the middle man he becomes the reconciler, and he writes a letter to Philemon.

Now hear me and hear me well, there is such a thing as Christian tactfulness. A Christian ought not to shy away from tactfulness as being something devious and less than worthy. Notice in this letter when you read it for yourself, what Paul does -- he begins by appealing to the better side of Philemon's nature -- he begins to tell him what a grand and good person he is, and all the wonderful things he hears about him! -- and what he's doing for the Christian faith.

That's the mark of a good leader, always to appeal to the better side of a person -- God's always doing that with us, you know -- God's always encouraging us to build upon the good that he can see. And He stamped us, you see, with goodness, don't forget that!

And the second mark of a good leader is this: he says to Philemon, "I could pull this business of rank on you, I really could! After all, I did establish you in the Christian faith, and I know something about the Church in Colossae, and I could command you to take this man back, but I'm not going to do it. I'm going to ask you to take him back because you know it's the right thing to do" . . . and he appeals to him on that basis.

Occasionally I speak quite parenthetically to you as I stand at this Sacred Desk -- it's been my good fortune across the years to work with a staff. And

one of the basic policies that I've always had in my relationship with the staff is this: never to say to a staff person, "You do it because I tell you to do it." I may believe fervently that I'm absolutely right in what I'm asking that staff member to respect, but I plead with that staff member, wittingly or unwittingly, to accept what's being offered on the strength of what's being advanced. And if one can't come up with something better, then hopefully that staff member would see the wisdom of what's being proposed. That's exactly what the Apostle Paul is doing here! - - "I'm not telling you, I'm appealing to you to see the wisdom of it." And that, too, becomes the Christian.

You need to know, it was at some risk that Paul, the middle man, chose that course. In those days, how different from now, a slave would run away, having been caught or retrieved - - you know the best that could happen to a runaway slave when he was back in his master's fold? - - this is the best that could have happened to him: a red-hot iron would sear upon his forehead the initial F -- Fugitivus -- fugitive -- runaway. And he'd be branded by that as long as he lived. It could not be erased.

Now the worst that could happen to him would be that he could be tortured or crucified, and that's the risk that the Apostle Paul took when he sent Onesimus back to Philemon . . . because Philemon, fine Christian that he was at the beginning, was still a human being, and there was always the possibility that he could fall from grace. That's the risk.

But Christians are always the risk-takers. Whenever you do anything in love you're always taking a risk; whenever you speak the truth you're always running a risk that people will not understand, or even question your motivation. Paul, the middle man, sends Onesimus back to Philemon, and by the grace of God Philemon is given the instruction -- now listen to this! -- "Philemon, you take him back -- you don't take him back as his master, you don't take him back as your servant. But you take him back as a brother in Christ!" - - talk about playing to the full the role of the middle man!

Tradition tells us the story has a marvelous ending. It works out exactly the way it ought to work. Paul sends Onesimus back, Philemon receives him.....
....Onesimus grows and develops in the Christian
faith and eventually becomes the Bishop of Ephesus.

Now before I walk away from the Sacred Desk I need to remind you that the superb middle man is always Jesus Christ. He's always in the middle between you and somebody else. According to our theology and Scriptural truth, He's always

in the middle between the Father and us. We recently celebrated Ascension -- where is He? -- we use the picture language which we need to employ -- He's sitting at the right hand of God the Father.....

...what's He doing? -- making intercession in our behalf!

He's the middle man. There is no redemption possible aside from Jesus Christ as the middle man.

Now when you think of your role as a Christian, do not shy away from the fact that here and there you will be in the position of the middle person -- and the middle person, by the grace of God, is meant to be the reconciler and the healing agent. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

"ON BEING ANXIOUS"

(Matthew 6:25-34)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There are two examples that you may wish to keep in mind as this sermon is being preached. The one I can give to you only as I read about it: there were two patients in the same hospital, presumably they shared the same room. One was in most critical condition, the other was well on the road to recovery. But for some reason that can't easily be explained, the patient who was on his way to recovery had access to the chart of the person in his room who was dying. Believing it to be his own situation, in no time at all he died - - he died from anxiety - - he scared himself to death. I believe it.

I believe it because of the second example that you're about to hear, and this I can attest to from first-hand testimony: He was a member of this congregation. He had three children and a wife. There were difficulties....he never quite seemed to be able to cope with the problems that came to him. When he became ill and was hospitalized, he died after several weeks. There was no known medical reason that could be attributed to the cause of his death. There were some of us close enough to the scene to honestly believe that he, too, died from anxiety, because he had been very, very anxious about himself and about those for whom he had responsibility....and he couldn't quite see any way to cope. He died an anxious person, he died with a worried look upon his face.

I want to talk this morning about anxiety. First, and properly so, the causes of anxiety.

Dr. C. S. Michaelson maintains that there are three causes for anxiety:

One -- what he is pleased to designate as the cosmic cause - - which is simply to suggest we live in a world, and because of the world situation, we can suffer from anxiety.

-- as an example: never have we had people more concerned
about the possibility of our running out of natural resources

....there are people who are anxious -- when you no longer have oil reserves

-- there are people who are anxious when they think in terms of our environment, and the way we are depleting our natural resources....

-- there are people who read the future and become very anxious when they think of all the pollutants by which we could disease ourselves into death.....

There are people who are anxious, as they read the future, when they think in terms of a possible nuclear threat. I remember of course, as you do, the turbulent 60's. Some of us were hard-pressed to understand and to explain the erratic and rebellious behavior by our younger friends. A psychiatrist explained it this way: Don't you realize that this is the first generation of young people to be born into a world where they could be denied, because of world conditions, their tomorrow! Restless, they become rebellious, because tomorrow could not be theirs.

....we live in that kind of a world.

On the other hand, we have been told, and I think quite properly so, that older people have become anxious, because as they live in the kind of world in which we live today, they think of the future, and they're afraid their tomorrow could last too long. On one hand, those who are anxious about the future because they think they may not have a tomorrow - - - and on the other hand, another segment of our society, realizing that more than 50% of our population could be under 30 years of age and young people who are not always as respectful of age as we would like them to be . . . when the aged could be at the mercy of the young and the aged could live longer than they would like to live with what they may have to face -- they're anxious about a tomorrow that could last too long, thanks to the situation in which we live today.

So there are those who maintain that we are anxious because of the cosmic situation.

There are those who maintain that we are anxious because of the social situation. Man -- let it be said repeatedly, is by nature a social person. We never completely come into our own except as we have interpersonal relationships -- we need one another, and when God made us, God made us as social beings, who need to be cultivated, inspired and motivated through personal relationships.

- - there are those who read the future, even as they think of the present mood, that we're living in a time of impersonal relationships ...and we become anxious. What's going to happen to us when our lives will be determined by technology which can be very, very impersonal...what's going to happen to us, they say, and they become anxious, and justifiably so, when we have to live in a world of robotics -- methanical devices, that can even determine our fate? So some people say.

Man is by nature a social person, and he needs the interpersonal relationships. He never completely comes into his own except as he has contact with other people. But urbanized as we are, we live in concrete canyons, we insulate ourselves, wittingly or otherwise, and we deny ourselves what is essential to the completion of our growth and our maturation.

A simple incident that I bring to your attention: he was a nondescript sort of person -- people really didn't pay much attention to him. But the day came when he was told that he defrauded the people for whom he worked of over \$100,000 -- and it all happened very simply...he just walked from where he worked to the District Line, and for fifteen minutes out of the day he became very important as his bookie met him. There was one person to whom he was important, and that meant something to him - - he needed that kind of interpersonal relationship.

...there are those who say we are anxious, and the cause is society.

Hear me well now when I tell you this - - as charitable and as ironic as any rationalization for prostitution that I have heard is this: the girl who by her own admission said she became a prostitute because, she said, "At least - if only for a couple of minutes, I'm important to somebody."if only for a little while.

There are those who say we are anxious, and we run anxious because we're being denied proper inter-relationship with people. Did I ever tell you the story, pathetic as it is - - it goes back to the days when travel across the ocean was primarily by steamship.....and here was this woman of some means, lonely as she was, she came to the dock and discovered it was lined with people -- withing "Bon Voyage" to all the people who were boarding. In her loneliness she pressed a dollar bill into the hand of a youngster and said, "Now when the ship leaves, and you're standing on the dock, would you please wave to me?" - - as pathetic as all that!

....there are those who say we have people who suffer from anxiety because they are denied some kind of a wholesome relationship with another person....

Then, Michaelson says there is a third cause for anxiety. He has a strange word for it -- it's not in your vocabulary, it's not in mine: Ontic - - which means the development of the self, the realization of personal identity, and being able to control your own destiny. And any number of people I know become very anxious because they can no longer control their own destiny....

...my heart goes out to certain people when they're told they can no longer drive . . . last evening as I finished this sermon I was constrained to call one of our parishioners who was very much in my mind and my heart, and his great burden now is that he's denied the chance to take the key, put it in the ignition switch and drive down the street as he had been wont to do.....

Any number of people become anxious when they think in terms that they can no longer control their future -- as though they ever could! It's not enough to talk about anxiety and the cause of anxiety. We need to talk in terms of a cure.

Is there a cure?

There was a psychiatrist who thought that he had a cure. Let me tell you about him and the client who came to see him.....

...the client came in, sat down, and said, "Doc -- I'm anxious, I'm troubled, I'm disturbed. A man owes me \$5,000 and I don't think I'm ever going to see it."

And the psychiatrist says, "Relax! Sit down! Let me give you a prescription I am sure will work for you: Don't worry about it! Forget about it! Don't give it another thought!" "Why," he said, Just the other day a man came in to see me, and his problem was that he owed a man \$5,000, and I said to him, 'Relax! Forget it! Don't worry about it!' . . . and he just called me on the phone and he said, 'Doc,' I'm relaxed! It's working! -- I'm not worrying about it!' " The man stormed out of the psychiatrist's office - - he said, "Doc, that's the man that owes me \$5,000!"

There's no cure for anxiety other than the prescription that Jesus Christ gives.

Now you know very well that whatever is said from this pulpit must be rooted and grounded in Scripture. And I've reserved to this precise moment the reading of the passage of Scripture that you and I cannot afford to ignore - - and to ignore it is at our own peril. The words are the words of the penniless preacher, who some 2,000 years ago stood upon a hill and spoke as people had never heard a man

speak. And as He gave them unforgettable prescriptions regarding life and our relationships with one another and our relationship to God, the giver and sustainer of life. This, now, is the passage of Scripture: the 6th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, it begins, this extract from that great sermon, with the 24th verse and continues to the 34th. Says Jesus:

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other . . ."

...which is Jesus' way of introducing this whole business of priorities -- someone has to come first. And when someone comes first, then something else is second.

"You cannot serve God," said Jesus, "and mammon."

By mammon He means the material things and the things of this world -- the things that are not of primary concern to God.

Jesus continues, "Therefore I say unto you . . ."
one translation puts it this way:

" -- Don't be anxious about your life. Take no thought for your life. Don't be anxious whether you shall eat . . . don't be anxious about what you will drink . . . don't be anxious for your body, what you will put on. Is not your life more than meat and your body more than raiment? . . ."

" --get your priorities in order. What really now is more important?" -- He was always doing that sort of thing.

Notice how magnificently now He brings to our attention an illustration right out of the natural world.....

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. yet your heavenly Father feedeth them . . ."

...and now He's appealing to our simple reason --

"Aren't you much better than they?"

Who among us doesn't honestly believe that he's of more value than a sparrow?

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his own stature? And why do you take thought for your clothing?"

...beautifully put, Jesus says,

"Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed

like one of these.

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field,
which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven,
shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

...and there's the clincher -- of course you're going to be anxious, because you don't have your priorities in order. Of course you're going to be anxious, because you're not trusting our Heavenly Father.

"Wherefore," says Jesus, "take no thought - - "

" . . . Don't be anxious about what you should eat
or what you should drink, or wherewithal you will
be clothed, for after all these things do the nations
of the world seek. Your Heavenly Father knows that
you have need of these things! . . .

" . . . but you seek first the Kingdom of God and His
righteousness, and all these things shall be added
unto you "

There you have the prescription of Jesus Christ as a cure for anxiety.

What is He saying? Do I have to remind you what He is saying?

He's saying, "Sort out the issues - - it isn't that material things aren't important. Said Jesus, "God knows that they are important. He's put you in the kind of a world where food and clothing -- they're possible. He made a world where we could have these things. And God gave you brains, He gave you skill, He gave you energy, He gave you talent, by which you can make the most of the natural resources in which He's placed you! God knows all of this and God had all of this in mind -- He made the kind of a world where your needs could be met. God thought about it from the very beginning."

....that's really what Jesus is saying!

-- if you want a cure for anxiety, you concentrate
on the things of the Kingdom -- get your priorities straight --
That's your first concern.....

But honestly now, it isn't for many of us. We're always worrying about whether or not we're going to have a bank balance.....

....we're already worrying about whether or not we can
afford that next car....

...we're always worrying about whether or not we can have a
second place, a place at the beach or a place in the country....

...we're always concerned about whether or not we can
have that other vacation to which we honestly believe
we're entitled....

...we're always trying to think of how we can take care of ourselves first, and then
if there's anything left, well, God, then maybe you'll have a chance at it.

Jesus says, "That's all wrong! Think first in terms of the Kingdom, and then
all these things will be added to you." Ask anyone who's ever really tried it! Ask
anyone who's ever really put God first - - and there you will get your answer: -- it
does work. It does work.....it does work.

I've lived long enough to be with certain people in the moment of death. And
then, all of a sudden, in a moment, it becomes crystal clear that many of the things
to which we thought we had to cling tenaciously in this world are of absolutely no
value at all! The most pathetic figure I've ever read about is that person on his
death-bed, with his energies slipping fast away, using whatever energy there was
left to check out his bank balances and to clip his coupons.

But what remains are the things that belong to the Kingdom of God. Maybe
some day -- maybe -- some of us will give Him credit, that penniless preacher, for
knowing exactly what He was talking about....

...but wouldn't it be wonderful
if we found it out before it was
too late!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE HAPPY PEOPLE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

You ought to know that there are some preachers who dread certain aspects of the parish ministry. Some dislike very much making pastoral calls....some find it a very difficult thing to preach a sermon....some are very uncomfortable sitting down and looking at one person in particular and having a face-to-face and heart-to-heart relationship. I count myself fortunate -- I've never dreaded any one of these, but have thanked God for the opportunity which He gives to me as His witness to reveal some measure of God's love and truth as He may see fit to channel it through me.

I think you should know, awed as I am, when the time comes to stand at the Sacred Desk, I have never dreaded it. You should also know that the older I become, the more I become excited about preaching the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ.

It's this time of the year when I anticipate the preaching schedule for the following winter and spring of another year, and I said to our Associate Pastor this morning, I would hope that when that schedule is prepared, I might be able to preach a number of different sermons from what we might refer to -- "A 40-year Perspective" -- because there are certain things that I honestly believe that I might be able to say to you now which I might not have been able to say when I began my ministry. So I am quite excited about whatever time God may continue to give me to stand at a Sacred Desk such as this.

It's especially true this morning, because I'm quite excited when I realize the text with which we must deal is a text that comes straight out of the preaching and teaching life of Jesus Christ. Whatever you think of Jesus Christ, you must remember that He did come preaching, and He did come teaching. On occasion you ought to ask yourself this question: What did He first teach about? -- What was the subject of some of His very early sermons?

He didn't begin to teach, He didn't begin to preach until He was about 30 years of age, and all that happened up until that time I dare say was prefatory --

God was giving Him ears by which to listen to what people were talking about

...God was giving Him eyes by which to see, where people were going

and what they were doing, and how they were spending their time....

God gave Him opportunity throughout those first 30 years to be very quiet, to become silent, that the reservoir of the spirit could be filled with God's truth and the Heavenly Father's love.

And then one day the time came when He became the person who moved around from place to place...preaching...teaching. The time came when He said to this person and to that person, "You're my man -- come, follow me, be my disciple." And from that moment on He spent any amount of time just being alone with them -- teaching, instructing them. And all that you're about to hear now as this sermon unfolds comes, I dare say, from that early segment of His preaching--teaching ministry. Now what do you suppose was the theme of His first instruction? What do you suppose was the subject of one of His very early sermons?

He lived at a time when there was a great deal of political unrest, of course -- they were seething under the yoke of the oppressor, no question about that! Economically -- are you aware of the fact that in the day of Jesus there were only two strata of society -- the very, very rich, and the very, very poor. And that was a deep and abiding concern to any number of people. Politically...economically, materially -- even in the world of religion there was division and hostility. When it came time to preach and to teach -- what do you suppose He addressed as the subject that seemed to Him of dominating concern?

Well, before I tell you the answer to that question, let me attempt to give you this as part of the preface to this sermon: I never cease to marvel when, as the moment comes to stand at this Sacred Desk, that from this particular vantage-point I can look over the congregation, and what do I find myself saying to myself -- how different we are! -- are you aware of that -- how different each of you is from another person? You see, this is one of the benefits that comes so naturally to the pastor who's been blessed as I have been blessed, to be among you year after year and decade after decade, as one who ministers to a particular people and in a particular place for a particular period of time. One does come to know his people as only the passing years can permit.

I can see you now as I close my eyes - visualize each of you according to your differences that characterize your mood, your temperament, your basic make-up

as a person . . . each of us is different, no question about that!

On the other hand, as one endeavors by calling and conviction to be a good pastor, I have become not only increasingly aware of what variety there is in the individuality of each of you, I have also gained an inestimable appreciation for what we have in common, of what makes us so much alike!

-- if you're thinking now for the moment a likeness that we share because of our sinfulness, you could be correct. It's written into our liturgy -- no sooner are we together than these words are spoken: "We poor sinners confess unto Thee - - " ...we're all under the same umbrella, we make no exceptions. So we are alike in our sinfulness.

-- and if you think for the moment that we are alike in the love that God shares equally with each one of us, you are correct! -- because we are all in the hand of God's love, whatever the level of our belief or our unbelief may be. ...and we've written that into our magnificent liturgy too -- you know the salutation that the presiding minister gives when he looks out over the congregation, and what does he say? - - "Beloved in the Lord - - " Every single one of you is an object of God's love!

...God loves you, and you, and you - - not one bit more nor less than the person in front of you, beside you or behind you. But for the moment I'm not thinking of these things that we have in common, as much as I am thinking of the dominant desire that characterizes every one who is here -- that desire is to be happy. Every one of us wants to be happy. That's what we have in common!

Now when our Blessed Lord sat down in one of those early preaching-teaching sessions - - would you believe it when I tell you this -- that's the very thing that he addressed in that marvelous Sermon on the Mount, which can be perceived either as a sermon that was preached to many people or a teaching session to a handful of disciples, He begins talking about happiness -- even then the strongest dominant desire in every human being.

Helmut Thielicke, the able German theologian and one of Europe's best-known preachers of recent years. maintained, and I quote, "In every one of us there is no stronger desire, there is no stronger drive, than that for happiness. It is

so strong that as soon as we achieve one happy goal we are immediately on the look-out for new shapes and forms of happiness. No sooner has Faust attained and satisfied his desire than he begins his desire all over again, and I quote now:

'And so from longing to delight I reel,
And even in delight I find have longing.'

So happiness is constantly changing its shape and is always just ahead of us. For one it may be money and success, for another, the satisfaction of accomplishment...
...for another, the comfort and peace of just being at home, at one's own hearth and with one's own loved ones. . . . "

Are you aware of this, that no person in Silver Spring was happier this past week than a member of Saint Luke congregation, who for weeks had been hospitalized, and his heart's desire was just to get home and to sit on the back porch....

...and when he came home, he walked up to the steps,
walked through the front door, walked straight through
the house, just to sit on the back porch....

He's here with us this morning now. . . something as simple as that to make a person happy.

We're all engaged in the pursuit of happiness. We've even written it, these forefathers of ours, when they thought of the foundation upon which our nation would be built. About 140 years ago they were called the "Argonauts of '49" -- it was the Gold Rush, remember, when people were going madly to California, looking for gold. In a certain sense, I suggest to you, we're all Argonauts -- we're all seekers for something precious. In this case, if you please, we're seeking for the gold of happiness and contentment. But the pathos of life is that men seek for happiness and satisfaction where it can never be found!

The Spaniards who followed Ponce de Leon toiled through the wilderness, only to discover that they were looking where there wasn't any gold, they were looking for gold where gold was not to be found. I suggest to you that we can be as ignorant in our moral geography as the Spaniards were in their physical geography. They struggled on in their quest for the gold of happiness, ever seeking, never finding -- ever disappointed, ensnared by the pestilential passions that rise out of the low places of human nature....

...God have pity upon those who think in their
lustfulness, the lowest aspect of our human nature,
that happiness can be found....

...God have pity upon those who in their greed
think that as their greed is satisfied, they can

become happy.....

Deluded and deceived by the mirage of their imagination, tricked by remorselessness fortune, until death puts thus far and no farther to their journey.

Say it again and ever so often -- the thing you and I have so much in common is the pursuit of happiness.....and it can also be said again and repeatedly so, many, if not most persons in our society are not happy because they are looking for happiness in the wrong places.

Dr. Samuel Johnson, 18th Century writer, had that very excellent piece in which he has the imaginary prince, who lived in Happy Valley, of all places, surrounded by tall, majestic mountains....

....and within the place where he lived he had peace and tranquillity -- his every need was met, he lived in the lap of luxury. But eventually he had this crazy notion that there was greater happiness somewhere else, and he contrived a way by which he could escape from his Happy Valley . . . and he roamed the world, thinking that somewhere he could find someone who was happier than he -- only to discover that there was no happiness like the happiness back there in Abyssinia.....

Come now, what does it take to make a person happy? Whether you spell it out: two billion dollars -- write it out....or whether you put the figures down such as these: the figure 2 followed by 9 zeroes -- 2,000,000,000! -- it's still a lot of money, two billion dollars....a whole lot of money, when especially it's been reported to have been the wealth and income of one person, a person named Howard Hughes. Asked in an interview if he was happy, the recluse replied unhesitatingly and honestly so, with that one word, "No." Ask it again and again, what does it take to make a person happy?

Now the text that's inspired all that you've heard to this point -- the beginning of a preaching and teaching ministry by Jesus Christ, a penniless preacher, who when He sat down, His disciples came to Him and He said, as He began to teach them:

"How happy are those who know their need for
God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs . . ."

....which is simply to say, we who are Christians are the fortunate ones. Numbered among all those who pursue happiness, we have the recipe: There is no happiness apart from God.

Pascal, in that excellent writing called "The Thought" says, "All happiness comes from God. It's to be found in Him. Too many people look somewhere else. And in our relationship with God, happiness itself is never an end in itself. It's something that comes to us as we have our experience with God."

Ask anyone who can testify to that -- "The love of Jesus, what it is, none but His loved ones know." . . .

. . . "In my heart there rings a melody"
....the joy of those who are numbered in the ranks of the redeemed.

When people look elsewhere for happiness, it's elusive, it's always somewhere else and beyond them. But when Jesus Christ talks about happiness, it belongs to those who know their need for God. He says happiness can come to you in the here and now, for, said Jesus Christ,

"Happy are they who know their need for God, for
theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

When my days among you may be over, I should like to be remembered, as any person would like to be remembered, as a person who tried to help you to believe that it's a happy thing to be a Christian.

Happiness is knowing Jesus Christ....it's as simple as
all that. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

"SALT OF THE EARTH"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Matthew 5:13

Once there was a preacher who, very willingly, said that his ideal situation was a study and a pulpit, and there would be a tunnel connecting the two -- which simply means, of course, that he wanted to be removed from people, he wanted to have no contact with folks. He simply wanted to sit, prepare his sermon, go to the pulpit and deliver it, and that would be it. You can thank God that there are not too many preachers like that.

And we can thank God that Jesus Christ was not that kind of a preacher, because we would miss so much that He had to tell us if He had simply confined Himself to a secluded area, then stood up and delivered what He had prepared. Much that we place in high value to this very day comes to us from the lips of Jesus as He looked round about while He was preaching. I'm willing to suggest to you that some of it came quite incidentally, it wasn't part of his original preparation -- it had occurred to Him while He was preaching.

I try to take a page from the book of Jesus Christ in that regard, for I have never allowed myself to become a slave to a manuscript. And even though the sermon is pretty much the same at 8:30, 9:30 and 11:00, there is always the opportunity for something to be introduced that might not have been included at another time. One needs to keep himself open to that kind of thing.

As an example -- the text that you are about to hear now, we have, I have reason to believe, because as Jesus Christ sat down, or as He stood, as the case may have been, in a preaching and teaching session at the very beginning of His ministry -- He either smelled something, or He looked out over the horizon to a town not far away, and then He said to them . . .

(remember now, what I just told you -- He either smelled something, or as He looked out over the horizon to a town not far away)

. . . He said to the people in front of Him: "You are the salt of the earth."

Now who said what is sometimes dependent upon where it was said, the conditions that may have prompted the comment. Now not far away from the place where Jesus was

saying these words there was a town with a Greek-sounding name called Terachea which means -- and this may surprise you, because you don't use the word very often, if ever -- picklery. Now in that town the people made their livelihood by curing, drying or pickling fish.

Not far away was the Sea of Galilee, where the fish were caught. And there are some folks here this morning, as was true for 8:30 and as will be true at 11:00 o'clock, who will remember when they were pilgrims in the Holy Land, how the people in charge of the itinerary always made it a point to take us to the Sea of Galilee, and for lunch invariably the menu was always the same -- they served us St. Peter's Fish, as they called it, that was caught in the Sea of Galilee.

Now the fish caught in the Sea of Galilee would be preserved, and to preserve it they used the salt that came from the Dead Sea....and it may be of some value to you to know that originally the Dead Sea was known as the Salt Sea. It's only been in comparatively recent years that it's referred to as the Dead Sea. But they would take the salt there to preserve the fish.

You know very well, as is true in some parts of the Middle East today, they do not have the benefit of cool springs or ice or refrigeration, and they are very dependent upon using salt in order to preserve the fish, to keep it from going rotten. Now Jesus Christ, keen student of human nature, observing the scene, says to the people in front of Him, "You are the salt of the earth."

Within a matter of several hours, presumably you might be seated at the dining room table, and I can hear it now: "Please pass the salt." Did it ever occur to you how important salt really is? -- how valuable it is as a mineral? Are you aware of the fact that there are three natural substances that man has used ever since he first appeared upon earth? -- and all three are necessary to life. You think quickly, of course, of air and water. But how often do you think of salt as the third of the three natural and basic substances which a person needs in order to live?

Did I not read somewhere that scientists tell us that in the warm salty waters of the first sea, land life began. From the ocean, living creatures crept out upon the shore to begin a new and different kind of existence. Now listen to this: they kept a part of the sea in their bodies. Even to this day the make-up of human blood has some of the elements in common with that of the sea or the salt water.

It has also been maintained that our bodies are formed of tiny cells which might be compared to minute building blocks. These cells are collected, then, into various organs -- the heart, lungs, kidneys, etc., and the cells are bathed in a circulating fluid which supplies them with the elements they need for living. It is made up of blood cells carried in a salty fluid called plasma. If this fluid dried up, or if the salt were removed from it, the body's cells would die.

Some doctors say that if every trace of salt were removed from our bodies, we would not live more than 48 hours. When the body cannot get the salt it needs, there is trouble -- salt hunger. Have you ever heard of it?

...salt hunger is terrible. Animals have been known to eat wood or rags or leather in an attempt to get salt. And would you believe what you're about to hear now -- there was a farmer who wanted to sue the U. S. Government because his cow died from eating the paint on an airfield signal.....but he was told that it was his own fault -- if he had given the cow the salt that she needed, she would not have eaten the paint....

.....when Napoleon's soldiers were retreating from Moscow, in the winter of 1812, they perished by the thousands, partly because they could not get enough salt. As a result of this lack, they could not bear fatigue, their wounds would not heal, and their food could not be properly digested.

Necessary as salt is, and in all fairness I need to say this, sometimes the physician will put a patient on a salt-free diet, but the fact remains, a certain amount of salt is absolutely essential.

Now I must also tell you as I stand at this sacred desk, that salt has been referred to as the mineral with 14,000 different uses! Amazing as it may be to you, I have been given to understand that the first patent that was ever taken out by an American was for some kind of apparatus to help make "salt."

....I can also tell you that the Erie Canal has sometimes been referred to as "the ditch that salt built" because it was essential for the salt caravans to transport salt cheaply in those days.....

What Jesus Christ is saying, and how much more emphatically He could say it to-day in the light of these statistics and facts that I've given you, is salt is essential, salt is valuable, salt is a basic ingredient. Let me say it again and ever so often, it is one of those substances natural to life without which we could not live, as essential as air or water.

Now Jesus Christ is saying to people as He looked into their eyes, just, presumably, as I'm looking into your eyes -- "You are the salt of the earth" -- and by that He means: "You're essential -- you're valuable!" -- it's a compliment. As you and I sometimes say of someone for whom we have very high regard, we say it again and ever so often . . . I find myself constantly using these words: "He's the salt of the earth" -- and you know exactly what I mean....and we dread the thought of living in a society without someone like that!

Now, for the time that remains, I need to tell you that we will limit our consideration of the 14,000 uses of salt to two in particular: one, as a preservative:

-- salt keeps fish from going rotten, salt keeps fish from becoming decayed. Once it decays it has no value at all as food and becomes very offensive to the nostrils, of course.

...when Jesus Christ surveyed the human scene at 30 years of age -- no question in His mind that there were forces at work in society that made it go rotten! They were constantly corrupting society and the social order and mankind -- no question about it at all.....

I am sorry I have to tell you this, but most people succumb very easily to corrupt forces -- most people. That's a shocking fact. And by that I mean -- brace yourself for this -- we allow society to shape us. We become conditioned all too easily by the environment in which we find ourselves. And when society allows itself to run that course, it can become corrupt. Even the Church of Jesus Christ -- God raised up Martin Luther, God raised up any number of the reformers as people who were used by God to keep the Church from corrupting itself. And every now and then, as any student of history knows, God who loves His world, will not stand by and see it consigned to Hell, but He will raise up this person and that person to be as a kind of preservative -- to keep it from getting rotten. And that's exactly the role of the Christian.

Christians are a minority in this world. But take heart, my friend, it's amazing what a single grain of salt can do! -- or just a sprinkling of salt can do. Never underestimate the value of the influence of a single person. I have known communities that have been changed because one person in particular happened to have come and lived there, and raised the whole moral tone of that place....

-- preachers, if you'll pardon the expression, who are "worth

their salt" are overwhelmed by a sense of awe when they realize the responsibility that rests upon them to fulfill their faithful obligation to set the tone that Jesus Christ wants set within the life of a community which is known as a Family in God.....

Let it be said again and again and repeatedly so, salt makes a difference! And when it's used in this sense it's meant to be a preservative to keep something from going rotten. One person as the salt of the earth makes a difference.

I have been in places where one of you in particular happens to come in, and the tone of the meeting changes! I have been around some of you sometimes, you may not have been aware of it, when someone has had an inclination toward something that was vulgar, and you shifted the emphasis magnificently to something wholesome and winsome. One of the grandest compliments I think ever paid a President of the United States was paid to that grand old man, Dwight David Eisenhower, who looked like everybody's grandfather! -- it was said of Eisenhower, he was the kind of a person who when he walked into a room, people began to think together.

I once had a man serving on a staff for which I was responsible, who I used to say when he would walk out into the hall, five minutes after he had gone, I felt as though I was in a frigid atmosphere. That may be an exaggeration, but you understand the intent of it's being said. Said Jesus Christ to a handful of people: "You are as salt" -- you can keep the world from going rotten, you can keep the world from becoming corrupt. Christians are meant to make a difference.

And the second thing that I can say to you about salt, very hurriedly, is: it adds zest and it adds flavor. Just as it keeps something from becoming corrupt or rotten, so can it also take away the staleness, if you please, and add a bit of zest -- you season it with salt!

...the little boy was absolutely right when he was asked to define salt, and as only in a child's way he said, "Salt is why your potatoes taste bad when you don't put it on . . . "

The absence of salt denies us a bit of flavor and a bit of zest to life, to make life winsome, and flavorful, and it's possible because a Christian is a person who knows who he is. His life is not dulled into monotony. He has a sense of identity, he has a relationship with God, and the Christian is meant to be a fully integrated person, a person who has it all together, because he knows the stock from which he stems and he knows his destination -- Heaven is there ahead of him, and each step that he takes is toward that blessed abode.

And because this is true, because he knows that he's being redeemed, because he knows that he's not a child of Hell -- he's a child of Heaven -- he can have a spring in his step, because his life is possessed by zest -- he adds a bit of flavor wherever he happens to go.

Would you believe this -- it's as simple as all that! -- Jesus Christ, knowing full well that His followers would always be in the minority, He was hopeful in the difference that they could make. And the longer I live, the more I recognize the shadow for good that's cast by this person and that person, wherever that person has gone . . .

. . . you are that important

. . . you do make a difference

. . . you're the salt of the earth!

This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(this sermon transcribed
as recorded)

"DECLARATION OF DEPENDENCE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Psalm 67:1

On this day before the national holiday that commemorates the establishment of thirteen colonies into a nation, the sermon bears the title: "Declaration of Dependence" - - and the text, of course, is Psalm 67, the first verse:

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us . . ."

Let me begin in this manner. It was in the summer of 1776 when delegates of thirteen colonies gathered together in the city of Philadelphia. They met in what we now affectionately and respectfully refer to as the Old State House. What, now, was it that brought them together? With the historical perspective in sharp focus, they had one single overriding concern: they met in order to think about the future - - their future on this North American continent. The point that requires due and proper emphasis is the concern that they had -- not for the past.....the concern that they had, not for the present situation in which they found themselves...but their deep and abiding concern for the future. In a certain sense, they were generally mindful of us.

Let it be said, of course, that they were a people in deep trouble. They could not go back across the ocean. They had come to the New World, and now no matter how difficult their plight, they had no intention of admitting to a mistake. They could not think of continuing indefinitely as they thought of their present situation. It was the future that overwhelmed them.

Now, speaking of the future, allow me to digress momentarily as I think of two posters that I've seen displayed in recent years. You know, we have had the last decade or two when much regard has been given to what's been said by way of graffiti -- bumper stickers or posters. I sometimes call it 'preaching by posters' . . .

...one of the posters was rather somber, honestly it was. I don't know that it was meant to be that way. Rather, I would say it was an attempt to strike a hopeful note against a dismal background. It had just enough color

in it to engender hope -- an orange sunrise,
some plants of wheat...and then with a simple
one-line legend: I STILL BELIEVE IN TOMORROW
....as though someone were constrained to say
this! . . . as though somebody of necessity had
to say to all the rest of us, "Don't give up!
As you think of the future, be hopeful, be
optimistically inclined."

Now the other poster. I even specifically recall when I saw it. It was in Boston, the year of the Bicentennial. I like to say to myself that its inclusion in a varied display was purely non-intentional -- it was decidedly a message of some doomsayer, and I'll quote it for you directly:

DUE TO LACK OF INTEREST, TOMORROW
HAS BEEN CANCELLED

For many of us, we can understand that. For many the mood is pessimistic. In certain quarters optimists are viewed with suspicion. As we think in terms of tomorrow, July 4, the 207th birthday of our nation, many of us will admit that there is cause for somber reflection. True it is, as someone has observed -- listen carefully now,

"As nations go, we are still young, or were young. We were the big, rich, good-natured wonder kid from the farm, lately moved to town -- able to lick any kid on the block -- independent, brave, proud, self-confident. And now at this age, there's some gray in the hair and some doubts in our hearts . . . "

Age, say it honestly, say it unhesitatingly, can bring a sobering effect. It is coming to us. Troubled as we are by the present, we do worry about the future. As an example: -- if we are unsafe on the streets of our cities today -- what about tomorrow?
-- if today we say government is too big -- what about tomorrow?
-- if we can't pay our bills today -- what about tomorrow?
-- if inflation has taken its toll even though it is moderating now, we can still say, what about tomorrow?

- - if we can't handle our children, our young people -- today . . . what about tomorrow?
- - if some among us today work from January until June, working in order to meet our tax obligations, to support a government that is still in debt, billions upon billions -- what about tomorrow?
- - if people in responsible positions operate without any sense of moral values today -- what about tomorrow?

And one cannot be ignored at the expense of another....we can't possibly face the future by pretending the present does not exist.

Every age contends with the present in the light of its concern for the future. Only in retrospect are some times, according to the beholder, sometimes better, sometimes worse, than has been. Each generation has, or should have, its own struggle as it thinks of the present against the past, against the future.

I've told it to you before, haven't I, maybe you'll remember -- that line from George Bernard Shaw's play called "Dr. Cannock." It's a clever line, it goes like this: "If you say you are well, it is only because you do not know that you are sick." In 1776 there were a group of colonies, thirteen in number, and in trouble. In 1983 we are a nation of some fifty states.....and we are still in trouble. Cannot we learn anything at all from those who gathered in that summer of 1776 in the city of Philadelphia -- to fashion the terms by which their future would be shaped?

As anyone who reflects upon any kind of a meeting, you may assume, of course, that at that meeting in 1776, there were any number of people who did a great deal of talking, without much substance. There was one person who remained silent for most of the deliberations, and all the while they were still without some sense of unity and without some sense of conviction as they thought in terms of the future. Seemingly, as a matter of historical record, I dare say, many of the suggestions were found wanting. Seated at the conference table was a gentleman who is referred to as the "oldest and the wisest person" among them, Benjamin Franklin. At first he had refused to say anything. Finally he arose to his feet and spoke a few words, based upon Psalm 127....and mark it well, from his brief talk came the spiritual foundation of the United

States of America!..and the note that was meant to be struck in the Declaration of Independence. To all ears, to all eyes let it be heard and seen that one man, speaking in terms that commanded respect, was declaring with clarity and conviction that no future should they chart that did not keep God in the picture. Benjamin Franklin said, and I quote, "I have lived a long time, and the longer I live the more convincing I see of this proof that God governs in the affairs of men, and if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His will, is it possible for an empire to rise without His notice? We have been assured in the sacred writing that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it. I firmly believe this. And I also believe that without His concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel."

....that was Benjamin Franklin.

And then what do you suppose he did: he suggested a time to pray. Then the conference began to find an element of unity among them, and the United States of America was born . . . and the date was July 4, 1776.

There are two observations that need to be made. One, they dealt with their present problems only as they thought in terms of the future. We need to give proper heed to that, so easy is it for us to block and to imprison ourselves in the present moment, and not to think that God always has a tomorrow in mind. Not so the Founding Fathers! Their overriding concern was not the past, not the present, but the future.

Did it ever occur to you how great is the debt that we owe to the Founding Fathers of this nation, and particularly those who introduced the spiritual, the religious dimension? -- the God-factor. Tomorrow, let it be said with true feeling, cannot be cancelled, cannot be postponed, no matter how pessimistic we may deem it.

The second thing: as they thought in terms of their future they kept God in the picture. The future will be according to God's terms, make no mistake about that! I remain profoundly grateful that one of the first talks that I ever gave in a theological seminary was upon an assigned theme: "GOD IN HISTORY." I have always had a high and holy regard for the way God is at work in and through history by the emergence of tomorrow, a tomorrow that comes to us from yesterday by way of today!

Now there is another way of putting this -- by keeping God in the picture

they recognized themselves as dependent people. Say it repeatedly, before they fashioned a Declaration of Independence, they admitted to a declaration of dependence. As the delegates responded to Franklin's call to prayer, they were also indicating their belief in the God who comes to us through the Scriptures -- and say that again -- we must have a high and holy regard for the God who comes to us through the Scriptures, as a God who comes to us through history. What our Founding Fathers did was simply to bring God into the picture. To include Him in our future, whether they articulate it or not, the moment had to come when they would declare in one way or another at least these two things:

one -- they were dependent upon God for

His blessings;

and two -- such blessings could be theirs

only as long as they would be about

His business

..."God be merciful unto us and bless us, and cause your face to shine upon us, that thy way may be made known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations."

Shaw also wrote a great play, you know, about Joan of Arc, how she left her home and inspired the French people to battle against their English conquerers. In one scene, young Prince Charles is complaining because Joan, obedient to her heavenly vision, has rebuked his softness and his cowardice. With no desire to be a hero he cries out: "I want to be just what I am! -- why can't you mind your business and let me mind mine?"

...the peasant girl, God bless her, in her fanatical zeal replies, as Shaw puts these words sublimely into her mouth: "Minding your own business is like minding your own body. It's the shortest way to make you sick. What is my business? -- helping Mother at home. What is yours? -- petting lap dogs, sucking sugar sticks . . . "

Imagine the woman's courage!

Then she goes on to say so superbly, "I tell you, it is God's business we are here to do, not our own. I have a message for you from God," said she, as the preacher pointed her finger in his face . . . "and you must listen to it! -- though your heart break with the terror of it."

Today we suffer - "I want to be just as I am -- don't trouble me" . . . only

as you look at our country through the eyes of God can there be any hope for the future.

An esthetic of the Southern Presbyterian Convention, Dr. Faye Valentine, has written of God's concern for this world, and I quote,

"Jehovah God was portrayed by the prophets as being concerned about such things as military alliances, the selling of debtors into slavery, the plundering of the poor by the rich, the cheating of the buyer by the seller, and the oppression of the weak by the strong. The God of the Bible, the God of Christians, know through personal faith in Jesus Christ, is no abstract "First Cause" or "Prime Mover" or "Great Unknown" out there in the "Great Somewhere" who can be placated by discreet crying in the chapel.

He is a personal God who is very deeply and very definitely concerned about military alliances, racial segregation, the unconscionable profits of the oil industry, and indefensible price-fixing that honeycombs big business, and the criminal corruption that persists in organized labor.

He's concerned also about tax evasion, padding expense accounts, the exploitation of violence as entertainment, of family fragmentation, as the 100-billion-dollars-a-year-and-more which we continue to spend on our weapons.

Say it again and ever so often, is not the real tragedy of our times that although on occasion we have tried and tried desperately hard, both nationally and internationally, to bring in the New Earth where righteousness could dwell, this charred and blasted world -- blown half to ruins and shocked by the re-emergence into light of day of dreadful evils which we had assumed were dead -- is that all there is to show for it? And all this because we thought we could manage without God."

I have been a disciple of Walter Lippman of more than a generation ago. And what did he say: - - "Our times have proved that Christ was right and that even with the best of intentions in his heart, the natural man can only muddle himself into muddle."

Our Founding Fathers declared their dependence upon God. Our debt to them is very great. They couldn't think of a future without God in it. It is at great peril that we plan our future if we were to rule God out of it. This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"TO HAVE IT MADE"

GRACE, Mercy and peace from God our
Father, and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Mark 10:17-21

Let it be said again and repeatedly so what you already know, no one has a right to stand at this sacred desk who does not root and ground all that he's about to say in sacred Scripture. The sermon that's about to unfold is inspired by this particular passage -- hear it now -- recorded as the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Mark, beginning with the 17th verse, concluding with the 21st. It deals with an encounter that took place between a very remarkable person and a penniless preacher . . .

" . . . And when he (the penniless preacher, meaning Jesus) was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?

And Jesus said unto him, Why do you call me good?
There is none good but one, that is, God.

Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and thy mother.

And he answered and said unto him . .

(now quite parenthetically let me add,
think how amazing this answer is)

And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these I have observed from my youth.

Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatever you have, give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Come, take up your cross and follow me.

And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."

I'm inclined to think that you can't possibly appreciate the impact of this passage of Scripture until you try to cast it in some contemporary form, and I'm going to make bold to do that.

Suppose now, when it came time for the sermon to be preached, the preacher did not stand at the pulpit, garbed in historic vestments of the Church -- cassock, surplice, stole. But rather he would introduce for you a guest preacher,

someone that I had met during the week, who made a tremendous impact upon me by the sheer strength of his basic integrity. I had heard him speak, and I was absolutely convinced that he had it all together, that he was possessed by a certain something which I would very properly refer to as the mind and spirit of God. And when it came time for him to preach, he would stand perhaps at the chancel step, wearing clothing that somebody else had given him, baggy trousers, ill-fitting -- hand-me-downs, cast-away.....maybe he'd have a belt on and maybe he wouldn't have a belt on. I'm not sure he'd even have socks on his feet ...he could be wearing sandals. He could even be wearing no tie, no jacket, a shirt with patches on it -- here again, a cast-away somebody had given it to him...

...his pockets, whether they had holes or not didn't make

any difference because he wouldn't have any money in those pockets...

But I had heard him preach, and when he had finished I found myself instinctively whispering the name of "GOD." He made Him that real to me. So I invited him to come and preach in Sint Luke Church.

Stick with me now.

...and when the sermon was finished, and just as the benediction was being pronounced, one of you got up from where you had been seated, ran down this aisle, and grabbed the preacher, and said, "Tell me! Tell me! Tell me! -- How did you get it all together? How is it that God's so real to you? How can God be that real to me?"

Now I need to tell you something about this fellow who ran down this aisle. He was dressed handsomely -- three-piece suit, just as though he had stepped from inside the cover of GENTLEMAN'S QUARTERLY -- the latest in fashion and the finest in fabric and cloth. I suppose I could also tell you that outside was parked a car in which he drove to Saint Luke. It's not too much to suggest as a possibility, of course -- a Mercedes, Cadillac, a Lincoln Continental -- it's not too much to suggest that when the service would be over, all other things being equal, he'd go back home, have a dinner prepared by the live-in maid, and if he wouldn't bathe in his rather luxurious pool in the back of his palatial residence, he'd head for the bay where he had another residence. He had just come in from Hawaii last week -- I can picture it for you that way! We don't have many members like that, if we even have one! But picture it that way, you need the contrast -- he's a person who in the eyes of the world had it made....he had prestige, he had wealth, and he was a moral person. It's this man, who can't wait to confront the preacher -- ill-clad, wearing cast-aways, not so much as a quarter in his pocket. And he says to him, "Tell me! Tell me! Tell me! -- you've got it!

You've found it! Where did you get it? How can I have this secret?"

Now if you think that's far-fetched, you're mistaken, my friend. Because a rich young ruler couldn't wait until he could confront Jesus Christ, a carpenter's son....

...who was wearing other people's clothing

...who had no money in His pockets

...a person who moved from place to place and was at the

mercy of what people would give Him....

After He had finished speaking, the rich young ruler said, "Master, tell me, how can I inherit eternal life -- I don't have it."

And Jesus said, "You are right, you don't have it. And I'll tell you why you don't have it."

...and we will talk about that in a minute.

I think sometimes we need to be shocked by that penniless preacher. Winifred and I went to Gettysburg the other night to participate in a Global Mission Event sponsored by the Division of World Mission and Ecumenism. There were four people on the platform, one of which was a girl from Appalachia. She was wearing jeans, and I think an old shirt, open at the top, sandals on her feet, clutching an infant, a tiny babe, cuddled close to her shoulder near her bosom. She may even have breast-fed him during the evening. When it came time to speak, she stood up, just as innocently, just as naturally as anything -- clutching that tiny babe, and in a completely unabashed way lay bare her soul about the way God had come alive to her through a person. We need to remember how God can speak to us through that type of a person. God was speaking through this penniless preacher to this very wealthy man.

Why am I preaching this sermon to you today? Let me put it for you this way. I am convinced that not many people -- some, yes -- but not many people of our generation could honestly admit to being completely satisfied with the life that they are now living. As an example: this welfare state of which we all draw some benefit in some way or another -- for us life is economically more secure, and materially more prosperous and comfortable than ever before. But men and women today are not noticeably more content, nor are they happier, or as happy, I dare say, than were their fathers and grandfathers whose lot was much harder.

Occasionally when Winifred and I head for the hills of home we visit the spot where her ancestors settled. You may not be aware of it, but this is the 300th anniversary of the immigration of Germans to the United States. Winifred's

ancestors came at the turn of the 19th century. They first settled in Philadelphia, then they came up the canal, walking with their belongings and with whatever oxen they may have had, and then as they looked over from the mountain they saw this beautiful grove -- it was in the spring of the year -- and they called it Blooming Grove. And they built their meeting-house, and they eked out an existence. Close by is a church-yard, and then the museum . . . and when you walk into that museum you soon get an aching back as you identify with the hard, difficult way they had to get an existence -- the back-breaking tools that they used. Life was not easy.

...but occasionally Winifred will put in front of me a journal or a diary, and I may read part of it, and I cannot help but be impressed how in that day, how life, no matter how difficult it was -- and they were always living on the edge of the frontier -- they were possessed with a measure of peace! -- they knew who they were! . . . and they knew their destination. This was no set permanent abiding place. They were enduring it on the way to Heaven! And they were possessed with a calm and a tranquillity.

I'm not sentimentalizing it, it's a fact! Modern man is still conscious of a vague sense of emptiness in his life and looks anxiously in various directions for something that will satisfy his needs and give him true contentment. Most people -- most people -- many people, seem to labor under the illusion, if only they could add a little more to the material comforts and possessions they already enjoy, that then they could have complete happiness.

How can I put it for you? I'll borrow someone else's words -- hard-pressed to improve upon them, "They do not realize that they are trying to satisfy a spiritual need by material means, which is no more possible than it is to satisfy physical hunger by spiritual means! Let me tell you this. A long time ago when I began my ministry I discovered that if a man is starving, you don't preach a sermon to him -- you give him something to eat. They do not realize that they are trying to satisfy spiritual needs by material means, which is no more possible than it is to satisfy physical hunger by spiritual means. When a man is starving, he needs not a sermon but a square meal . . . and when a man's spirit is restless and dissatisfied, he needs not more of the things of the world but more of the things of God."

Said Augustine, that beloved church father for many of us, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

So the rich young ruler came to Jesus Christ: "I've got to have what you have! I don't have it!" And with all that he had that Jesus didn't have. He was a remarkable chap....he was rich. And some people think you have it made when you're rich. Who doesn't want to be rich?

My colleague here in Saint Luke Church some years back, Robert Newton Clawson, used to say, with a twinkle in his eye, about the lady he knew in Oklahoma -- "She said, 'I have been rich and I have been poor, and being rich is better.'" Who doesn't want to be rich? This remarkable chap, he also came to Jesus Christ as a very religious person! Think of being able to say to the Lord and Giver of Life, to the face of Jesus Christ, "I've kept the Commandments -- I've faithfully obeyed the law!" Who among us can say it? -- as though we've done it as perfectly as he. But the chap was restless. These things did not satisfy him, not even obeying the Commandments. Something was lacking. And what was lacking was a relationship with the Lord and Giver of Life, a relationship that would give him a new center for his life, give him a sense of direction. That's what he was lacking. And Jesus said to him, (now listen carefully) "You lack something. You've got a lot. Now go and give it away."

Now please don't misunderstand Jesus, and don't misunderstand me. I have never been numbered among those who honestly believe that Jesus Christ means that we shouldn't have possessions. Possessions can become our opportunity, the means by which we can do good. I am in a position to tell you that any number of people in Saint Luke Church have drawn immeasurable benefit because we've had benefactors in this parish who from their means make possible certain things that many of us have been able to enjoy, and found our life and our relationship with one another, even in this Family of God, a pleasant experience. But Jesus said to the man, "Your problem is, you want to keep, and you want to grasp, and you want to get -- you're centering your attention on the wrong things. You have to get your life on proper center. The proper center is to learn to use what you have. You don't grasp, and you don't spend your energy getting. You spend your energy giving, and sharing. Get your center right!" -- Jesus is saying to this man.

Winifred gave me a garden cart that I use up in the country. I've soon discovered that it works best when I know how to keep the load on proper center. But let me get it off-center! Life is like that! Get your center right!

I've always been intrigued by people who are potters, who can take a handful of clay and fashion it into something useful and beautiful. The secret, they tell me, in being a potter is to keep that clay properly centered. Many of us have never mastered the fine art of keeping our lives properly centered. Jesus is saying to this man, "Center your life on God - - think first of Him."

Incidentally, and yet not so incidentally, where is your life centered? -- on the things of this world that you want to acquire and possess and to grasp, or are you centering your energy on the things that you have that you can use as you share?

George Frederick Watts has a great picture in the Tate Gallery in London. It's the picture of a dead man lying upon a bier, of course, and all around he's piled the goods and the chattels of this world - - musical instruments, books, many costly things - - - he calls the picture: "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi" - - you know the translation, of course - - "Thus passes away the glory of the world." And every inch the preacher, the painter, Watts gets his sermon across as below the painting he adds these three short sentences:

"What I spent, I had;
What I kept, I lost;
What I gave, I have."

Sounds crazy, doesn't it? A man without a penny being confronted by a man who had everything, and saying to the penniless preacher, "Give me the secret!"

.....and the Penniless Preacher gave him the secret.

But sad to say, he wanted to go on clutching, and grasping
and getting, and keeping....

And all the while Jesus says - - "Give - - share - - love - - live!"
Try it. You may learn to like it, even to the very Gate of Heaven.
This I most certainly believe.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"CHRISTIAN OF THE EXTRA MILE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Already in this service this passage of Scripture has been read. Don't think lightly of me if I think you need to hear it read again. For the sermon is based upon all the Scriptural truth that you find within this particular segment of the 10th chapter of the Gospel according to Luke.....

"... And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? How do you read?' And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.' And he said to him, 'You have answered right; do this, and you will live.'

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the inn-keeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'..."

None of the stories that Jesus ever told has more popular appeal than this one in particular. There may be a number of reasons why that may be true. As an example, in this our day it's so terribly relevant, because we can identify so easily with the victim. It could have happened to us. It happens all around us, and it happens any time of the night or of the day, that someone is victimized. So we can identify and we can relate to the story that Jesus told, one of the most popular of all the parables.

But I'm about to suggest to you that familiar as it may be, we always run the risk of misunderstanding or overlooking something or everything that Jesus had in mind. As an example, there was that earnest-minded Sunday School teacher who had diligently prepared for her class, trying to impress upon the minds of those who are young this particular passage of Scripture, the story that Jesus told. And she related it and related it very, very well. And then at the conclusion she said -- as well she should have said -- "Now what is the meaning of this story that Jesus told?" And one of the youngsters first put up his hand, simply said, "It means that when we're in trouble people ought to come to us and people ought to help us." - - - this is how egoistic we are, how egocentric we are. We're always thinking of ourselves and our need. Jesus had in mind the capability and the compassion that should characterize every single one of us as a follower of His, to keep our eyes open for those who are in need and to see that that need should be met. In a certain sense, my friend, the question isn't, who is my neighbor? - - but the question should be: to whom can I be a neighbor?

If it's a title that you want for this sermon, I'm going to suggest "The Extra-Mile Christian" and in order to develop that theme I'm going to ask you to keep in mind that so often when you deal with this parable you concentrate on only a part of the story that Jesus told and you overlook the lesson of the ending. We become fascinated, we become captivated by that Jerusalem-Jericho road. Some of us have traveled that Jerusalem-Jericho road, we can visualize it very easily this very moment, and we can also recall the voice of our guide who said, "Now this is what you read in Luke, chapter 10, about a person who was robbed and left half-dead....and over here had been the place where the Samaritan inn was located" -- and we think so easily and we concentrate primarily upon the incident on the road, and we have uncomfortable feelings and maybe some ugly thoughts about those good church people, those pious people, who when they came to where the victim was, kept their distance and walked by on the other side.

....and then our hearts are warmed as we still concentrate
on that Jerusalem-Jericho road incident, where it took place,
and we're gladdened that there was one fellow who came along
and did what had to be done, asked no questions....

And that's about the point where some of us stop when we think about the parable of the Good Samaritan.

But Jesus didn't. He goes on to relate another segment. And we ought to concentrate on that: the way the story ends. The Samaritan finds a place where they can be accommodated.

I'm willing to believe that he went out of his way. I'm inclined to think that maybe this wasn't on the itinerary of the Samaritan. Maybe he meant to travel another distance, but he went out of his way to find the place where this man's needs could also be met.

Now, you and I are zeroing in at that point of the story. But before we deal with that specifically, let me tell you that the distinguishing ingredient in the life of the Christian is the element of love. Christians are known by the way they love, by the way they love one another, by the way they love people. And what is it to love? To love is always to meet the need that exists.

Now when you love, there are two things that you have to keep in mind. One is, there is always a risk involved. Make no mistake about it, that Samaritan went to the victim at some risk to his own personal safety. There is reason to believe that the victim could have been allowed to stay there as a decoy, and the robbers, safely hidden, were waiting for the next person who might in their eyes be naive enough, if not good enough, to pay attention -- then they could have two victims and not one! Love always involves a risk, a risk that you have to pay a price in demonstrating compassion and meeting a need, and a risk at your own personal safety. It's a fact of life. You can't read it otherwise. In order to really love, you've got to go where the person is, and that may not always be safe ground. But Christians were not meant to be detached. Christians are meant to relate and to identify. And that's why it's significantly stated: the Samaritan came to the place where he was, the victim was.

And then too, in this whole business of loving there's the risk involved because you have no guarantee that you're going to get a return. It isn't the nature of love to offer what it gives because it's going to get something back. You have no assurance that your love will be appreciated, that your love will be respected, you do not even have an assurance that it's wanted! But love seldom asks questions except to do what needs to be done.

Now let's get on to the concluding segment.

Here we have this marvelous evidence of another facet of love: love means responsibility -- responsibility for the person that you've encountered. Once you have met someone and once you have shared any element of love at all, your life can never quite be the same, because from that moment on you have an identification and you have a relationship with that person that you did not have before. And love, properly understood, involves a continuing relationship and a measure of continuing responsibility.

When people come to me sometimes for counseling, and they feel, as they easily refer to their love deteriorating, and when there's the inclination on the part of one to get out of the picture, or both of them, I am in duty bound to remind them that from the Christian perspective, love isn't like a spigot with the water flowing from it, where you turn it on or off at will. Once you encounter a person in the name of Jesus Christ, that relationship involves a continuing measure of responsibility. And no matter how you read this story of the Good Samaritan, you'll keep that in mind, won't you -- as magnificently evidenced by the Samaritan -- who not only put the victim on his own donkey, ministered to him on the spot, but went with him on the way to the place where he could be put up over-night.

...He stayed there over-night, saw that he was clothed and fed, and bathed, and his wounds ministered to....and then as he was going out the door -- can't you picture this? -- he turns, and it occurred to him that his job wasn't finished! -- because he happened to have been, you see, this magnificent person, a Christian-of-the-extra-mile -- he turned to the innkeeper and he said: "Here, I'm paying you for what you've already done, and for what you're doing today. But there's tomorrow -- and I have a concern for tomorrow, and I now having met this man, have a measure of responsibility for tomorrow in his life."

Did it ever occur to you -- that once we relate to some people today, there's a measure of responsibility for what happens to those people tomorrow! We can't pretend that we didn't meet them today when tomorrow comes....

....so he said to the innkeeper, "Here it is. And take my word for it, whatever more you need, when I come again I'll pay you."

Christians-of-the-extra-mile, Christians who are of the "Whatever more there is to be done count on me to fulfill that obligation, too"

I've come to the sacred desk this morning to sing the praise of the extra-mile-Christian. And if you don't mind, for the balance of this sermon I'd like to give you page and verse of this person and that person whom I've met along the way, who represent and personify so well the extra-mile Christian -- doing not simply what is right, in performing at a minimum level, but going on to whatever more may be needed. Some simple things may have never occurred to you --

...that this morning at 8:00 o'clock in the Chapel of The Grateful Heart a handful of people -- never enlisted, never

recruited, went an extra mile - -

I recall, and recall so well, and I hope as long as God gives me memory I shan't forget it - - we had a retreat session at Bethany a number of years ago, where a group of people separate themselves from the world, they went there as a retreat, to get away from the world, to isolate themselves from the world, to nurture their own spiritual life -- a very profitable and necessary thing to do.

....but I was delighted to learn that when the session was over, later on in the week I was told about one of the people who attended - - she went directly to the home of a semi-invalid in this parish, and bathed her, tidied up her room, did some shopping for her -- not a requirement, nobody made the assignment.....but an extra-mile Christian....."Whatever more there is . . . " Ah, she sensed it! And she did it.

My life has been marked by people who have gone out of their way to be kind to me, who have gone out of their way to be good to me....

- John Bishop, an ordained minister of the Lutheran Church in America, when I first met him was a student in our divinity school in Gettysburg and I was an impressionable teenager, my first years at Camp Nawakwa. We met, our paths crossed. Would you believe me if I were to tell you that every Sunday night for the most part, when he was graduated from the theological seminary and I was a first-year student in college, frightened, terribly fearful of the new situation in which I found myself - - a whole new world in front of me . . . he went an extra mile and wrote me a letter, for the most part, every Sunday night, to encourage me in the ministry...

..."Whatever more I can do -- " said John Bishop

"-- let me do it."

- something as simple as this: she was here at one of the earlier services. She works in the inner city. It occurred to her that there are some people in her office who never get to see a lush lawn like she has and you have in suburbia, who never get a chance to see a flower garden that's radiant with this plant and that bloom. So what does she do on occasion? - - she deliberately chooses certain people, she gets up early in the morning, she stays up late at night, and prepares a nice lunch . . . then she asks for an extension in the

lunch hour of about fifteen minutes and she brings them out on the Metro, and allows this noontide period to be like an oasis of the spirit -- an extra mile, not a requirement. One could have settled so easily for so much that's less! -- an extra mile!

I can't help but think when I see our fellow member Tom Bast at the console today -- in his professional life he's the manager of Mrs. K's, our neighbor across the street. Let me give you this perspective on them....

...they could say, we will be a neighbor to Saint Luke by keeping our property in good repair, and we'll try to serve a decent meal that's good and wholesome and clean, so that people can say they have a neighbor across the street that enjoys a good reputation throughout the world -- which they do....
...and then there's this spacious parking lot across the street, and they could say to themselves, we'll keep the grass cut, we'll gather up all the litter, we'll be a good neighbor to Saint Luke-across-the-street -- and that's important....
...but they've gone the extra mile! -- not a requirement -- and they get no tax benefit for it -- -- they make that spacious lot available to us gratuitously....this extra mile dimension!

Last evening when Tent Troupe returned, when the last item had been tucked away in storage and the trucks put over on the other lot to be returned on Monday, Ellen had an evening meal at 9:30 for Pastor David and for her brother and for Christopher. The three of them had returned from Tent Troupe. I sat there and got caught up in some of the conversation. Let me share this exceedingly precious thing with you -- a marvelous example of an extra mile....

-- these Tent Troupers, don't think of them as just a bunch of youngsters who go off in the summer for a lark, and who trip easily from one community to another in a detached sort of way. It's been drilled into them: You're ambassadors for Jesus Christ and you relate to the people that you visit in each place -- get that in proper perspective -- don't sell them short. And remember that you helped to fashion them and you helped to nurture them and you help to sensitize their conscience -- -- listen to this: last year in one of the communities where they visited there was a woman, a nurse in the intensive care unit in the local hospital, who took time off to come with her youngster. She had heard about these youngsters from Saint Luke Church. She was thrilled by the performance.

It was the last thing that that nurse, that 31-year old woman and her child ever did together of that type. For not long afterward, Tent Troupe learned when they returned to that community this summer -- not long after their visit last year she tripped down the stairs, and the accident has left her a paraplegic. . . . our Saint Luke young people learned of that when they went back to that community, and spontaneously, on and on, they included that as soon as they could between performances -- they'd even go in their costumes, they would visit that woman, and they did sing for her the songs they sang on the stage! She could not come to them, but they would go to her -- that's the nature of love! Love is always saying, I will go....I will go....I will go -- and when I come to where you are I will meet your need.

Christian love is always the love that's characterized by the extra mile, and nothing is more superb by way of example than even God Himself. If God wanted to be something less than the God He is, He could have said, "I made you and I gave you the world . . . period. But that's it!" But the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Great King and Head of the Church, is always going the extra mile in our direction. So He sends us prophets and priests and kings, He gives us the Law, and even when we don't heed, and in our sinfulness, He comes all the way, traveling that divine distance from Heaven to earth -- the extra mile -- to meet us in our time of need.....the Christian-of-the-extra-mile is always saying to Himself, What more can I do -- what more can I do? In order to be that kind of person you have to have eyes open to the needs that have to be met. There has to be a propensity on your part, a willingness, to sense that when the time comes.

Occasionally I hear people say to somebody else, "You're always doing nice things, you're always thinking of nice things -- I wish I could be like that!" You can -- -- when you allow yourself to be that disposed. Don't worry, keep yourself open to the opportunity. God will supply maybe more than you may wish! It's always there -- -- the Christian-of-the-extra-mile.

* * * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

(Mr. Cofield's Service)

"TO GOD BE GLORY"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

i Cor 10:31

Undoubtedly you could not sense it, but surely he was much aware of it as walking in procession there was so near to me the person whom we especially honor today, and think of his more than twenty years of devoted service to the Lord Jesus Christ, specifically as the Chief Custodian of this House of God.

My mind went back to those more than two decades that have passed since the very first day that he came here to work. He did not have on him that day the handsome suit that he's wearing now....and I did not walk alongside of him wearing the vestments that I've donned as I stand at the sacred desk today. He was in his work-clothes, and I was in the suit that I was wearing on that particular day. It was his first day at work -- let that be said again -- and he and I walked this aisle, came here to the chancel step, and unashamedly I tell you, we knelt in prayer. For we were to be co-workers -- the work that he would do, and the work that God had called me to do -- we would do together in the name of Him who is the Great King and Head of the Church. It's in that perspective that all that's going to be said in this sermon is being cast.

And having said that, let me also say to you that we're accustomed here in Saint Luke Church to marking special events. My mind goes back quickly across the years . . .

- when we had a special service when the Rev. Dr. Robert James Marshall, President of the Lutheran Church in America, worshipped with us -- we used a special order that day.....
- then when his successor was named, the Rev. Dr. James Crumley, Jr., we extended to him a special invitation to come and to visit this parish, and he came, and we used a special order.....

-- when the Secretary of the Lutheran Church in America, the Rev. George Frederick Harkins, was retiring, we extended to him a special invitation, and he came...and we made of it a special occasion....

-- on the first Sunday in September, just a few weeks away, the Bishop-Elect of the Maryland Synod will pay us a visit, and we'll use a special order.....

....even as we made a special occasion when his predecessor, a former member of this parish, became the Bishop of the Maryland Synod....

So we're accustomed to special orders. And I dare say to you -- none have we treated with greater regard than the manner in which we gather for worship today. That needs to be said.

The sermon bears the title: "To God Be Glory," and the text is the 31st verse of the 10th chapter of a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to some Christians who lived in the wicked city named Corinth. The text for today's sermon marking this special occasion consists of only nine words -- nine very simple words -- seven of which are monosyllabic. The first and the last of the nine words have two syllables each, the others only one syllable. One can't make it much more simple than that! And that's precisely, we dare say, what Preacher Paul had in mind when he chose his words very carefully.

He was a preacher who had spent some time in Corinth, in fact we have reason to believe that he stayed there longer with that group of people than he did any other group except the Ephesians. He was very familiar with the place, and he knew the people very, very well, and he was not insensitive to their problems. Wherever you have people, you will have problems. Only a fool would think it to the contrary. And now while he is in Ephesus he gets reports from people who come to him from Corinth, and they gave him to understand that things are not well in that church, they always had a new set of problems. But this one now seems to be a bit more critical than ever, and Paul, out of pure love for those people and out of pure love for the Gospel, prays earnestly about their problem. And then he writes them a letter. What now can he say to them that can hold them in good stead? -- that no matter how they may have to wrestle with their problem, what is the same thing that he could say to every single person who had membership in that church in Corinth? -- what would be his salutary prescription?

It's a very simple thing -- you've already heard the nine words, and you would do well to make them the text-of-texts for your life in the next few weeks, repeating them to yourself constantly:

"Whatever you do, do all things to the Glory of God."

You're fully aware of the fact, aren't you, that when he wrote those words he was not writing them to a bunch of preachers! I'm not at all certain that there was a single ordained person in the church at Corinth. There were all so-called lay people. He wrote those words to carpenters, to bookkeepers, to merchants, to men who cared for the horses, to men who worked with their hands, to craftsmen, to artisans . . . not a single ordained preacher in the lot! And he said to them:

"Whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God."

Why is it, I ask you, that very foolishly sometimes we think only those who are set aside, ordained or consecrated, are the ones who do God's work? Is it a hangover from the period before the Reformation, when people, devout members of the church even, allowed themselves to think that unless you became a priest, or a nun, or a monk -- you weren't doing things to God's glory. Martin Luther, bless his soul, struck the note forcefully when he said in terms such as these, that the shoe-repairman who takes a pair of shoes, much in need of repair, and affixes the soles and the heels solidly to protect the wearer against the elements of the weather, that they might be helpful in preserving his health -- the cobbler who does his work honestly and well, does a thing as acceptable in the sight of God as the priest who stands with folded hands before the altar saying his prayers.

...why is it that sometimes you allow yourself to think that only a Johann Sebastian Bach, composing a piece of music to be sung in a church service, would very naturally write above the score "To The Glory of God Only"....

...why is it that some of you may have allowed yourself to think that the kind of thing we're doing now would be the kind of thing that we'd experience only if we were setting aside a Minister of Music, a deaconess, ordaining a pastor, commissioning a Director of Christian Education . . . ?

The text that's being used in today's sermon comes as naturally for this man, this servant of God, Mr. Cofield, as it would come the day when we ordain men to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament before this altar.

Let it be said, and clearly so, that we're celebrating today a man and his work. And what was his day's work? -- work that kept him busy holding a mop in his hand, or a brush or a broom, getting down and scouring smelly commodes and cleaning out wash basins -- this is what we're celebrating, more than two decades of this kind of work. And what he's done, he's done as he began -- to the glory of God. We're celebrating work done joyfully and willingly. He looked forward to coming to each day's work. In fact, even though his last official day has already been performed yesterday, he's graciously and generously said, "I'll come back again to help you whenever you need me, willingly and freely" -- (you did say that, Mr. Cofield?) . . . we're celebrating work done joyfully and well.

You need to hear me tell you this: when the politicians in the Bay State were grooming another Kennedy for office, they were fully aware of some of their pitfalls, because young Kennedy, young Teddy Kennedy, on whom they cast their eye, was rich, young, and inexperienced. He'd never done a day's work as we think of a day's work. But they knew that they had a prize -- even the name Kennedy meant so much. So those who were responsible for his campaign said, "If we're going to launch this thing at all, we've got to get him to relate to the working man." So they arranged the campaign so that frequently he'd be going to factories and mills. And they always had the photographer there to take a picture of Kennedy, young Teddy shaking hands with the workmen.

They were quite pleased with the way things were going as he was funning for his first public office, the seat of his brother in the Senate, and he was shaking hands with some people who worked in the mill. And they were very happy with the way things were progressing -- until he was confronted by an old codger who caught young Teddy short and said to him, "Mr. Kennedy, they tell me you've never done a day's work in your life!"

...his advisors and his friends were nervous and
edgy....Kennedy himself began to fidget and blush...

...there was an awkward silence prevailed....

No one knew what to say or how to act. Totally unprepared for what he heard, and totally unprepared for what was to follow, because shortly thereafter the old codger said -- the man who said to him, "Mr. Kennedy, they tell me you have never done a day's work in your life" -- he added by saying,

" . . and let me tell you something, Sonny,
you ain't missed a thing!"

You and I smile broadly, of course we do, especially when we think how Kennedy was taken off the hook. But let me say to you as seriously as I can, it's a lamentable thing to know that there are any number of people who have endured their day's work -- it was something that had to be done. They never elevated it, they never celebrated it. And that is the important thing.

We're celebrating today, celebrating a man who came to his work earnestly and gladly, for he was doing God's work. His hands were laid to a task that had to be done.

I think so often of our Blessed Lord while He was here on earth, saying something like this at an early age: "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" And then what do you suppose He did? -- for almost two decades He worked in a carpenter's shop!

..."Did you not know that I must be about
my Father's business?" . . . said Jesus Christ, and He had yet
to preach His first sermon! . . .

...the heavens were parted and the voice from Heaven said, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" -- and let me say it again, He had yet to preach His first sermon! For almost twenty years He was busy in the carpenter's shop, doing a day's work to the glory of God.

I can well imagine how in the day of Jesus the air was full of political, social, economic, ecclesiastical and international unrest. There was slavery and there was tyranny and war and intemperence. If you're interested in statistics, two-thirds of the world was enslaved....three-quarters were classified as people who imbibed too much. Imagine living in a society where 75% of the people could be classified as drunkards! . . . imagine living in a day when nine-tenths of the people could be accused of committing adultery! A historian has assessed the day of Jesus in that way. And what did Jesus Christ do? -- for eighteen years He did an honest day's work, in a carpenter's shop.

I say this to you because one of the precious memories I'll continue to have of Mr. Cofield is occasionally, when he would take time out for lunch, I would come upon him sitting in a rocking chair in the Child Care Room with the Washington Post in his hand. And I would say to myself as I would look and see him there, I know what he's reading, because I had already read that day's issue...and the news is not good that he's reading -- all the crime and all the immorality and all the unrest, and all the turmoil. But what would he do then? He'd put the paper aside,

reach for his mop, reach for his brush, reach for the dust cloth, and do his day's work - - knowing full well that God was expecting him to discharge his obligation in the situation where he was. And that would be his contribution to society, and I dare say, to the Kingdom of God, following the Godly admonition: "Whatever you do, do it to the glory of God."

Jesus was for nearly twenty years a carpenter in the village shop. It is incredible to think that for all those years He was just putting in time, waiting to begin His religious work . . .

"What was He doing all that time,
From boyhood then to early prime?
Was He then idle, or the less
About His Father's business?

...oh, no, surely not, He was offering each day as His work
to God, making tables and chairs, and yokes for God....

"Very near the cross of shame,
When He took the sinners' blame,
And the tomb wherein the Saviour lay
Until the third day came.

But He bore the self-same load,
And He went the same high road,
When the Carpenter of Nazareth made
Common things for God."

Think of Jesus as the preacher, think of Him as the teacher, think of Him as the miracle-worker, think of Him as the recruiter of people, of disciples - - think of Him as the Saviour of Mankind . . . but also think of Him --

"If Jesus built a ship,
She would travel trim;
If Jesus roofed a barn,
No leaks would be left by Him.
If Jesus planted a garden,
He would make it like Paradise;
If Jesus did my day's work,
It would delight His Father's eyes."

We're celebrating today a man who did his day's work to please God.

Dr. Bailey was Dean of Windsor from 1917 until 1945. He wrote in his autobiography, "The First 80 Years" of his young life as a young man in London. He lived with his mother, and every morning he would go and sit on her bed and tell her, in the spirit of sharing, everything that he had done the previous day -- his decisions were taken and guided by: Can I share this with my mother tomorrow? -- will

what I am doing today please her? In the time of Judgment, this man Cofield whom we honor today will stand before the Lord and Giver of Life....and the representative of God will say to him, as he will say to you and to me,

"What in Heaven's name did you do while you were on earth?"

....and Mr. Cofield will be able to say to him, as he has a mop in his hand, or a broom in his hand, or a dust cloth, or a wash-rag.....

"If it please you, God, this is what I was doing - - for You."

. . . and that's a happy thought.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THROUGH AN OPEN DOOR"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Acts 10:33

The sermon this morning bears the title, "Through An Open Door" -- and the text, according to the J. B. Phillips translation of the 33rd verse of the 10th chapter in the book of the Acts of the Apostles:

"Now we are all here in the presence of God to
listen to everything that the Lord has com-
manded you to say."

The sermon that you are about to hear is not the sermon originally planned to be preached at this hour. Had it not been for the fact that I came down here last evening after darkness had settled in, and as I am wont to do on occasion in a darkened church with no one around except the custodian bringing the final touches of preparation somewhere in the building - - I would find myself seated perhaps exactly where you are seated right now . . . (I've told you this before) . . . and as I would sit where you now are seated, I would ask myself the question:

- - who might be here tomorrow?
- - what will bring this person here?
- - what might this person expect to receive?
- - what should this person, in the name of God, be given?

....so I would think about you.

And then I would think about myself, trusted with the awesome responsibility to stand at the sacred desk. And then my mind would wander a bit - - and I'd think about this building, and I'd think about the door through which I had entered. And that triggered all kinds of thoughts in my mind as I went back several years ago to when we were having those delightful Fellowship Suppers and our Associate Pastor was charged with the responsibility of introducing some light feature in the program...

...some of you may recall how much to your surprise he put you through an exercise, asking a number of questions which you had not considered beforehand - - questions that dealt with the obvious, questions that dealt with things right in front of you, in full view.....

They were whimsical, maybe even foolish. But they did represent the obvious -- such as: -- how many light fixtures are there in this room?

-- how many tiles in the ceiling?

And then I remember he asked the question: How many doors are there into Saint Luke Church?

The answers all fell far short of being correct, of course, just as if I were to ask you right now: How many windows are there? (but don't begin to count -- it's hard enough for me to hold your attention as it is).

How many doors are there? Unless I did miscount, let's talk about that for a second -- there are 11. You who exit through any of the 11 -- to all intents and purposes you enter through only 10. Now you can figure that out later on.

The doors of Saint Luke Church. When you came today, you entered through an open door. Where did that open door lead you? One is in duty bound to sit down and reflect occasionally, very earnestly and very soberly, in this manner. Occasionally when you're walking somewhere through a building and you see a door ajar, and there's no sign on the door, and if you're at all curious, you'll wonder where that door may take you.

It was meant to be whimsical, of course, when those questions were put to us. But suppose you and I sat down and asked ourselves questions such as these:

-- why do we have windows? -- why do we have stained glass windows? Are you aware of the fact that a church has stained glass windows for two very simple reasons: (1) to protect us from the elements on the outside that may be untoward, whether heat or cold, wind or rain, dust or dirt; and secondly, stained glass windows became a part of church architecture at a time when generally speaking many of the people who came to worship were not very literate -- and stained glass windows were put there so that when people came to church they might have the Gospel communicated. And if their mind might begin to wander at different parts of the service which they might not be able to understand, they could, by the gate into the soul -- the eye serves as a window into the soul -- the truth of the Gospel could be communicated.

Are you aware of the fact that in this place, these windows tell the story of the life of Jesus Christ? They begin with the one nearest to me, with the Nativity, and then they progress and end up on this side, and the last one -- from the Nativity to the Ascension. Ask yourself the question: why do certain features in this place, why have they become incorporated into this particular place where we

come to meet God?

- the roof of this structure resembles the hull of a ship
- the very area in this part of the building is referred to as the Nave. The church very properly at one time in its history used such terminology because they wanted to remind themselves that the ship, the church is as a ship which transports believers from earth to Heaven! And there was a time when this was very important to people, that they have this concept, that we're all caught up in the Sea of Life, but the destination for the believer is Heaven - - and it's the Church that transports us in that direction, even to the very gate . . . and through the teaching of the Church and the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ are Saviour we are assured safe arrival.

Now let's ask the question: When you come through an open door such as this that you have used today - - why is it there to lead you in the direction of a particular place? As an example -- that open door that you entered leads you to this direction, where there is a pulpit, and on the pulpit there is an open Bible, and when you come to this particular place, you enter a door where you expect God's Word to be interpreted and the truth of the Gospel to be proclaimed.

When my highly esteemed predecessor became the Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Atlanta, Georgia, in no time at all, presumably, he recognized the debt that he would owe to his predecessor, who when he helped design that church, insisted that there be carved these words into stone, as the preacher would see them as he went to the pulpit:

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

Are you aware of the fact that that's exactly why the church calls you together under the influence of the Holy Spirit, that you mark the path that brings you to an open door that eventually leads you to a place where there is a pulpit, and on the pulpit there is a Bible, that the Word of God should be proclaimed and interpreted?

You have no idea what it would mean to a preacher, who's meant to be God's spokesperson, if you could come as illustrated in this 10th chapter of the book of the Acts of the Apostles, where when one person says to a man who comes on the scene, after having had a vision, Cornelius says to Peter, "Peter, we're here,

we're gathered together in the presence of God, and we've come to hear what you have to say to us in God's name." - - think what that would do for both preacher and people alike! - - if every time we gathered together there was this element of expectancy, this thrust that was placed upon the preacher to deliver according to the hunger and the thirst of the people who are in front of him.

We live in a world with so much confusion, so many voices calling out to us. But here in this place as we gather together, drawn by the Holy Spirit, there ought to be the note that's struck, the note of no uncertain trumpet:

"Thus says the Lord - - this is what you ought to hear"
....and by the brace of God those of us who are privileged to stand here count themselves fortunate to interpret to you what God has made known to us according to His Word. Through an open door you've come! - - and that open door has led you graciously in this direction. Through an open door you have come, in the direction of an altar, and on that altar is the cross -- the symbol of what we believe, the fundamental fact of our faith, by the act of redemption has already been done, that when you wait within a place such as this, we are a people who have been died for, we are a people for whom the price has already been paid.

I cringe a bit when people come to me and say, "I went to such-and-such a place, and when I was there the preacher was always talking about 'Christ died for you' - - 'Christ died for you' - - 'Christ died for you' - - - don't we talk about that in Saint Luke Church?" Of course we do. We not only talk about the fact that Christ died for us - - it is in every syllable of our liturgy! - - it's in every note that's struck, by the music we employ - - it's in every syllable of every sermon that's being preached, not only that Christ died for us, but that Christ lives for us. We don't worship a crucified Lord. We worship a crucified-and-risen-and-ascended Christ! -- who died not only sacrificially, but triumphantly. And when you come to this place the open door leads you in this direction, where the symbol of this faith is there, to remind you that this already has happened, and that you can have in your heart the blessed assurance that when you die you are being numbered in the ranks of the redeemed....

....when you come to an open door that leads to a place such as this, there should be no question in your mind as to whose you are, and whom you're meant to serve, and by whose blood you are being saved.

Today there will be people cradling in their arms a child, and they will stand by this baptismal font. When they enter through an open door they are marking a path that leads specifically to that spot, and they have no desire to have their child live another hour without having the indelible stamp of Jesus Christ embedded upon the fabric of that child's soul, as through the Sacrament of Baptism a child is named for Jesus Christ - - and in no uncertain way becomes part of the Family in God.

When you come through an open door such as this, do you realize it leads you in the direction such as this? What do you make of it? - -

- - three times within the last two days there were people who marked the path that led to this place -- coming through an open door with kin-folk and kith, to make promises to each other. But when they made those promises, they made those promises in God's name. It's not enough that they will face the future, it's not enough that they will face the future together, but as any number of you who are here right now -- when you begin your years together, you came through an open door to a place such as this and made promises -- not in your own name.....but you made promises "by the help of God."

When you come through an open door that leads to a place such as this, what's being said and said clearly, "You belong to God and you cannot exist without God, and you cannot arrive at the gate of Heaven without what God has already done for you."

Are you aware of the fact that every now and then you need to sit down and call it by name - - that when you mark the path that leads to an open door that leads to a place such as this, you came freely and voluntarily. I remember some years ago when a small company of us went to a part of the world that is under the Soviet influence, that's on the other side of what we refer to as the "Iron Curtain." She was a school teacher, she was baptized in the Faith. She told us how when the Lord's Day came she wanted to go through an open door that led to a place where God's Word was proclaimed, and His pardon assured. But what did she do? - - In all of Budapest she found out where the different churches were, and she went to a different church each Sunday of the month, because she knew very well that as a servant of the State there were those who were keeping watch as to whether or not she went to a place where God's Word was proclaimed and found herself being made strong in the fellowship of believers.

Had I not heard it with my own ears I would find it difficult to believe, but her own mother told me -- how when another of her children was born, she being a postmistress in a village in Hungary, a servant of the state, under cover of darkness took her child to be baptized. Ours is an open door! Let us never forget where it leads us, and why we have come here....and that we can come freely, voluntarily.

I shudder when I think how often we take important things for granted. That's why by deliberate design I find myself coming down here on a Saturday night when none of you was here, and I sit where you now sit, and I ask myself the question:

-- why will you be seated where you're now seated?

-- why will you mark the path that leads to an open door?

-- and when you face as you face, will you recognize the integrity and the validity of what you're facing? -- what it represents?

The tremendous truth remains: as you mark the path that leads through an open door such as this, rooted and grounded in the faith, and as you respond to God's love and truth, and as you exalt Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour - - this open door through which you've entered eventually takes you to the door of Heaven - - which will not be closed! . . . because in faith of the one you found in this place, or any place such as this, in the moment of death the outstretched arms of Christ will be there to welcome you through a door that no man can shut, once it's been opened by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. This is our blessed hope and in this we most certainly believe. Don't ever take it for granted.....

....bask in the glow of the endless joy of it!

...sing the song of the redeemed.

* * * *

(this sermon transcribed as recorded)

"WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?"
(II Cor. 5:17)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

There's a passage of Scripture that has gripped my mind and my soul for as long as I can remember, and I am constrained to deal with it in your presence this morning. It's the 17th verse of the 5th chapter of the Second Letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians who lived in the wicked city of Corinth. The old King James translation put it this way:

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation;
old things are passed away; all things become new"

J. B. Phillips expresses it in this manner:

"If any man be in Christ, he becomes a brand new
person altogether."

But now your attention, if you don't mind, to the carefully chosen title for this sermon that's based upon this text. And the title for the sermon is simply this:
"WHAT IS A CHRISTIAN?"

The title has been carefully chosen, let me say that again. And you'll notice, it's not Who Is A Christian? - but What Is A Christian? There's a difference.

I'm not so certain that any of us is qualified to pass judgment when it comes to pin-pointing this person specifically as a pure, genuine, bona-fide Christian -- so much so that that person, by his profession and practice, we can say is going to be guaranteed Heaven.

Now that may surprise you a bit. Because according to our fundamental Lutheran teaching, anyone who commits the name of Jesus Christ in faith and accepts Him as His Lord and Saviour should be given the assurance that when he dies there's no question about the gates of Heaven opening for that person. We do emphasize this measure of personal faith and trust which guarantees assurance.

But having said that - - I do know my Bible, and you know your Bible, and you're constrained now to recall what our Blessed Lord said when He was dealing with

this subject also: " . . . Not everyone who calls to me, 'Lord, Lord'
shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven . . . "

Not everyone.

And then He went on to tell them about a line that was going to be drawn, a line of demarcation. And to make His point He talked about sheep and goats, representing those who would be on one side as over against those who would be on the other side

...and those on one side would be saved/

and those on the other side would be damned....

...that's Scripture.

And that's our Blessed Lord for you! He did say that!

Now I'm fully aware of the fact that if I came to this Sacred Desk Sunday after Sunday after Sunday and preached hellfire, brimstone and damnation, you would shy away from this place. And if every time we came together I spoke to you in no uncertain manner about the time of Judgment and the fact that your soul could be in peril... ..you wouldn't find it a happy thing to come here to be reminded -- as that New England divine of a number of years ago would keep his congregation in front of him for two hours when he would talk about "Sinners In The Hand of An Angry God." But I am in duty bound to tell you that when our Blessed Lord spoke about who would be saved and who wouldn't be saved, He did talk about a line that was drawn, and He did talk about the saved and He talked about the damed. So what I'm simply saying to you is this: that it's not given to any one of us to pass judgment, because Jesus Christ has said that has been reserved for God Himself. In faith we live and believe that we will be saved, and we endeavor to back up our commitment by our conduct...our belief by our behavior - - our profession by our performance. And we live according to that faith. But it's only in the time of Judgment that it could be revealed to us. This is Scripturally correct.

... which means that some of us ought to be, then, when we look at other people and find ourselves inclined to make a value judgment and consign them to Hell - - only God has that prerogative .

Now if it's a bit of advice that you need at this point, perhaps these words, written anonymously, may be of some value to you - - - when you're inclined to pass judgment, now. This little poem-of-sorts, by the way, entitled "Surprise."

"I dreamt Death came the other night,
And Heaven's gates swung wide;
An angel with a halo bright
Ushered me inside.

And there, to my astonishment,
Stood folks I'd judged and labeled
As "quite unfit" - - "of little worth"
And "spiritually disabled."

Indignant words came to my lips,
But never were set free;
For every face showed stunned surprise --
Not one expected me!"

You need to keep this in mind when you're tempted to pass judgment on other people.

What is a Christian? Leave the who -- final decision, committed, devoted, genuine follower -- to Jesus Christ Himself. But in the meantime we can wrestle with this" What is a Christian?

I never cease to be amazed at the different levels of understanding that people have regarding religion, or even the Christian faith. Now, you may be included among some of these people, and that's particularly one reason why this sermon is being preached, that it might be helpful to all of us....

-- some people allow themselves to believe that the thing that's important is just being good, or obeying the Commandments. That is good. But it's not good enough! And it's not the whole story....

...our Jewish friends -- they have the Commandments, and I've met some Jewish friends of mine who have done a far better job of keeping them than some of us Christians have. But simply obeying the Commandments isn't enough....

--and then I find some people at the level of understanding who believe that they have achieved in their highest level of Christian experience by saying they believe in God . . . and now let's face it for a moment -- We Christians are not the only people who believe in God -- we're only a fraction of the total number of people on the face of this earth who believe in God! So when you say you believe in God -- that's good! But it's not enough! I give this to you on good authority by a man who was qualified to speak....

...when he was confronting the fact: What is a Christian? -- he came up sublimely with these words: "If any man is in Christ he's a brand new person altogether." And that's something more than simply saying you believe in God, it's something more than saying I want to be a good person, I want to be a moral person -- this is good! But Christians are not the only moral people on the face of the earth.

When I was in India on special assignment I met any number of Hindus who were perfectly moral, whose ethics and day-by-day behavior would put some of us to shame. But when the Apostle Paul is talking about what a Christian is, he had something much greater and beyond that in mind.

And then I have to be very fair with you, and very frank. There are some people who are inclined to think they have it made on this basis, if their name is on the church roll, as though that in itself will do it. I must tell you that wonderful as that may be, and I can't conceive of a person being a Christian without being related to the Family in God which is the Christian Church -- I can't understand how a person can genuinely believe in Jesus Christ and separate himself from the church. And I do encourage you to come to church, and I'm always delighted when people become members of the church -- you know that. But just having your name on the church roll, and just being identified as a member of the church is not enough. The Apostle Paul is talking about something over and above and beyond that! Even the Roman Catholic Church centuries ago, you know, used to subscribe to the doctrine that there is no salvation outside the Church -- but they have had done with that! They no longer cling to that notion. . . . and one of the great Church teachers would say -- now brace yourself for this one! -- "Not all who are inside the Church are going to be saved . . . and not all who are outside the Church are going to be damned!" ...and that's a sobering thought. But you get the point.

What, then, did the Apostle Paul have in mind? What is a Christian?

"If any man be in Christ he becomes a brand new person altogether."

In the simplest possible way that I can give it to you: a Christian is a person who allows Jesus Christ to take over his life. I can't make it in a more simple way for you. It's an encounter that a person has with God who has come to us in the form of Jesus Christ, and the person says, "Take over, Jesus Christ -- you rule my life."

This same person who said, "If any person be in Christ he's a brand new person altogether" -- eventually was able to say: "I live -- but I really don't live. It's Jesus Christ who is living inside me." . . . a change has taken place. A Christian is a changed person. Say it again and ever so often -- he's a new kind of person, he's a different person, once Christ has taken over.

Take the Apostle Paul as an example. He was most qualified to speak because before Christ took over he was a sheep-robber.....and now he becomes a shepherd. He persecuted Christians and tormented them.....now he's building churches, and he's placarded the world with "CHRIST CRUCIFIED"....."CHRIST ASCENDED"....."CHRIST IN ME." But it happened only after he had the encounter with Christ, and Christ took over.

Now if you're settled back and you're saying to yourself, well that's Bible-talk, Preacher - - let me confront you now with Francis of Assisi, a nobleman's son, who had everything and anything, presumably, that this world could give. But his life is changed dramatically when he allows Jesus Christ to take over.....it's a marvelous life, representing a tremendous change. And for shame upon us, we are the ones who say when we see certain people: "You can't change human nature" - - once you subscribe to that you might just as well forget about the Christian faith! - - because we're totally committed to the fact that Jesus Christ can change a person's life! That marvelous word that belongs in our Christian experience: conversion -- means change -- change -- change for the better -- a brand new change.

John Wesley is one of my favorite heroes of the faith. He was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church, he came over to this side of the Atlantic to minister to the Indians down in Georgia. But nothing great had happened in his life, he was going through the motions.....

- he was interpreting the Scriptures
- he was preaching sermons
- he was even evangelizing....

and on his way back, storm-tossed on the Atlantic, he discovered that the Moravians had a certain something in their life that was different - - the seed was being sown. And then one day in May, at quarter-to-nine, in Aldersgate Street Mission in London, he felt his heart 'strangely warmed' when a lay person interpreting Luther's treatment of Romans - - and a change set in! He became an entirely different person. It does happen, when Jesus Christ takes over - - "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me." It's the most wonderful thing that can ever happen! This I believe with all my soul!

Why do we shy away from it? Why are we willing to believe that human nature can't be changed? Why?

I had the good fortune to be on the first Commission on Evangelism of the Lutheran

Church in America, and when we would wrestle with what I refer to now as the primary task of the Church -- to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, we discovered that our efforts were weak for a very simple reason: any number of people could be corralled to go out and visit -- really, now -- to tell people about the Church. But Churchism is not Christianity. There is a difference. I know whereof I speak, because I know here in Saint Luke any number of you might be willing to go out and knock on doors and tell people about our music program....about our Drama Ministry...about Youth Ministry....about Christian Education -- -- you'd even know a glow, perhaps, when you said, "Why, we even have on our staff a person who is responsible for a Ministry to Persons With Special Needs!".....you might even talk about the Enlarged Facility....you might even talk about our location, we're so convenient to the Beltway, we have people coming from the east, the west, the north -- you might talk about all of these things. And I would be very happy if you'd talk about the way our worship is vital and meaningful . . .

But honestly now, some of you might shy away if this were your assignment, to knock on the door and once you were inside, to say: "I've come here tonight to talk to you about the most wonderful thing in the world -- my relationship with Jesus Christ -- a relationship that can be yours as well when you claim Him as Lord and Savior and when you allow Him to take over! It makes a difference in your life -- you become a brand new person altogether!"

....why is it, the most wonderful thing that could happen, and we don't talk about it? -- or we don't allow it to happen in our lives?

This is what a Christian is: a brand new person, whose life is being ruled by Jesus Christ. It is absolutely possible! And if I had time this morning, I could walk down this sacred aisle and point to this person and that person as Exhibit A. And that's a happy thought! . . . which is simply to say: it's happening,

and it's happening here!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed
as recorded)

THE USE OF WEALTH

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Today's sermon is inspired by a particular passage of Scripture. The 21st verse of the 12th chapter of Luke serves as the text for the sermon. The translation is from J. B. Phillips:

"That is what happens to the man who hoards
things for himself and is not rich where
God is concerned."

Before I even share with you the informal introduction to this sermon, let me begin with the under-statement of the year: Most everyone I know likes to have some money - or whatever is equivalent value. The statement, of course, is not without some qualification. You will notice I said "Most everyone I know . . . "

I did know a lady in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, who a year or so ago, at 90 years of age had come into her share of a family business which was being unexpectedly settled. It was a handsome bundle of cash, some \$800,000 I think. Now she at her advanced age, with all the restraints that were placed upon her so readily evident to anyone who would visit her, was something less than impressed. That's why I can say to you: Most everyone I know likes to have some money.

Now let it be said - - likes to have some money -- that's the second qualification of this statement, the understatement of the year. You see, the enthusiasm for a particular amount may vary from person to person, and one must always keep in mind the attendant conditions and circumstances that have to be reckoned with. It isn't that most people are greedy. Most people like to have the money they need in order to maintain a measure of independence and a reasonable life style.

I am convinced that we get money in one of four ways:

- we may find it -- not very often, but occasionally
that does happen -- we come upon it. There
is no owner, and with extreme difficulty one
comes to the conclusion eventually that the
owner could not be found. So we may get money
by finding it....
- we may get money by stealing it, by deliberate design we
choose to get what belongs to somebody else

and claim it for ourselves.....

-- we may get money by inheriting it, or someone sees fit to give it to us.....

-- or as I think of one of my favorite commercials -- a feather in the hat of that advertising agent who discovered John Hausmon (?) when he refers to a particular investment firm -- "They make money the old-fashioned way -- they earn it."

....and that's the way people can get money -- finding it, stealing it, inheriting it, or earning it -- by labor, or by prudent investment.

This sermon has several people in mind. Bear with me now as I tell you a bit about each one of them or the group that's involved....

-- he was a teenager, he became a part of a New Members Group here in Saint Luke within the last year-and-a-half. When we asked for the data sheet that new members are asked to compile, I earnestly looked at one of the answers to one of the questions, because I was just wondering how a teenager would respond to this question:

What is your objective, what is your hobby? - - and much to my surprise, the answer to both questions was much the same: "I want to make money" - - a teenager, about to become a member of this congregation, nurtured in the faith -- to be inspired to live the Christian life, unashamedly says, "I want to make money - - that's my objective in life."

I shan't fault him for it at all. It is a good ambition, if properly understood. And that's our responsibility, to help guide and direct an ambitious teenager who would like to have a handsome bank balance.

Now shift scenes for a minute....

-- it's a very delightful setting in his mother's home, we're having the evening meal together. He is 27 years of age. Of all the young people that I've ever come to know, none has gone so far so fast so soon as he. He has terrific drive - - he has a wonderful intelligence....he has a lot of savvy, and he relates well to people. And I felt myself constrained as I sat with him to say, "And what are your goals? -- what's your objective

in life?"

....and he began to answer me, and I could discern readily: to be recognized in his profession, and to accumulate a significant amount of this world's wealth -- no question about that. And I shan't fault him for it either.

Now, the third scene:

-- it's our retreat house, Bethany. This past Wednesday a group of women were together, part of the Bethany Fellowship. We're studying God's Word, the section of Scripture with which we must deal centers about a Christian and wealth -- a Christian and money. Can you reconcile the two? When you and I, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, talk about money we're talking, to all intents and purposes, in the presence of a Penniless Preacher.....

There were those who volunteered without any hesitation that they placed a high value on money -- they wanted it to maintain their independence, they wanted to maintain a certain life-style, and there was no question about the escalation of health and medical care -- they wanted to be able to meet that when that type of thing would arise. Every single one of these persons, each one of them a confessing Christian, is placing a high value on money. . . . and in several instances it's the driving force in their day's work. Is there anything to be said regarding this by the preacher who stands at the sacred desk this morning?

Now -- the formal introduction of this sermon.

Let me begin by telling you two stories. One of them is familiar with manyboth were told by preachers. The first story I'd like to share with you is told by Methodism's great preacher of a generation ago, Dr. Wallace Hamilton, who grew up in St. Petersburg, Florida. Presumably, as is true for some of us, he was recalling one of those instances that had occurred in his life that left an indelible mark upon the fabric of his soul. Again and ever so often in his preaching he used this illustration:

-- it was a story of two men, one was a smart and clever city lawyer. The other man was a plain, unlettered dirt farmer, who was really a sage in his own right. One day, the story has it, the city lawyer went out into the country to buy a horse. It was not just any horse that he wanted. His mind was set on a saddle horse.

His eye was taken by one that was prancing around in

the farmer's field. The lawyer insisted that the farmer sell it to him....he brought out all of his powers of persuasion. . .

. . . the farmer laid down two stipulations: (1) the price agreed upon should be paid; (2) the lawyer, as the buyer, would have to go out into the pasture and catch the horse that he wanted to buy. . . he'd have to catch it himself....
...the lawyer took his two sons into the pasture to face the horse. As the story goes, it wasn't a very easy thing. As the farmer stood by, it took three of them, the lawyer and his two sons, more than two hours until they had finally collared and bridled the horse. The lawyer, fresh from his triumph of having bridled the horse, was about to make payment. The farmer, being a very honest man, said, "There are two things I have to tell you about this horse before I take your money. In the first place," said the farmer, "the horse is awfully hard to catch."

...well the lawyer, of course, had already found it out, as he stood there fatigued and disheveled....
"Now the second thing," said the farmer, with something less than a devilish wink in his eye as he looked to his wife - - "The second thing I need to tell you -- he's not worth a darn when you do catch him!"

Whether the lawyer realized it or not -- presumably he did, he could have saved himself a lot of grief, had he inquired at the very beginning as to whether the horse was worth having.

Preacher Hamilton went on to make sermonical capital of that incident: a lot of things in this world are like that horse - - they're hard to catch -- if you do get them, it will mean hard work, long hours, self-denial, sacrificing yourself. When you do get it, there's always the risk that you won't have much in the end.

Now the other story. It, too, was told by a preacher a long, long time ago. And the story that He told has been repeated endlessly. Now this story has only one central character, a highly successful man whom the teller of this story denounced -- and this may surprise you a bit.

There are different ways to accumulate wealth -- you may steal it, you may find it, you may have it given to you, you may earn it. This man worked hard for what he had accumulated. Nonetheless, Jesus, the teller of this story, denounced him. In this case I'm going to read the story for you as it's been recorded. But before I do, let me remind you that it was about a man who, you could say, had it pretty well made, and I dare say, honestly so. The man, presumably, was the envy of any number of people in the East. He had only one problem with his wealth: how to manage it -- how to manage its burgeoning growth. This man was rich with harvest from a field that was flinty, as far as the soil was concerned, and in a climate that was difficult to give a yield. Where others had failed, he had prospered....and he went from success to success, from bigger crops to bigger crops, from bigger barns to bigger barns.....

...the Preacher who told the story didn't have a good word for him. To the contrary, he used mighty strong language in condemning him. Let me read this, the second of the two stories, upon which this sermon is based:

"And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?"

Understand it and understand it well, as Jesus did not condemn wealth in itself, as Jesus did not condemn ambition, I do not condemn ambition. But as Jesus condemned a man who having amassed a wealth, found himself being possessed by his wealth instead of his being able to possess it -- so I speak this word of warning to all of us. The acid test is: Whatever it is that you have, do you have it? -- or does it have you? Do you possess your wealth....or does your wealth possess you?

Wealth, now, in a comprehensive term, no matter what it may be.

Jesus condemned this man, not because he was wealthy, but because he failed to use his wealth wisely. He thought only in terms of accumulating and grasping and keeping to himself.

When I began my ministry I was privileged to serve a church that referred to its organ as the Carnegie Pipe Organ. And I said I never knew that Carnegie was a builder of pipe organs. Oh, he didn't build the pipe organ -- Andrew Carnegie, industrialist, accumulated a sizeable amount of wealth, and he gave it away. If a congregation was interested in stalling a new pipe organ, he'd say, "You accumulate the first half of the cost and I'll give you the second half." Why did he do that? Somewhere along the line -- and listen now very earnestly -- Andrew Carnegie, the wealthy industrialist, had come to the conclusion that for a Christian it's a sinful thing to die a rich man,....so he began to think in terms of how he could use what he had to the glory of God. He began to give it away, he began to share it. That's why God allows you to have whatever it is that you have! -- not for yourself and for yourself alone, but that you might allow others to benefit by it. Whatever it may be in terms of wealth -- your talent, your life -- God gives this to you that you might share.

In the final analysis, there are no pockets in a shroud. You can't take it with you! And in the moment of death, the admission to Heaven is not determined by how much you bring! . . . but in a certain sense it could be how much you gave away by your tithe.

At the conclusion of the service this morning as I was shaking hands, one of the persons who was here at 8:30 said, "Pastor, that sermon is more true to life than you may realize, and what Jesus Christ said in that parable is true. I knew a man with whom I played golf, and one day as we were finishing the game he told me how much money he had made in the past six months. And I said to him, What are you going to do with it? He said, 'Man, I'm going to keep it -- I expect to be here a long time, and I'm going to keep it to enjoy it.'" Your fellow member said to me as I walked away -- "And would you believe it, Pastor, within two hours after he had spoken those very words, he died!"

Death will come to each of us sometime. But let it be said again and ever so often, you can't take it with you. And maybe a crass way of saying it is the admission ticket to Heaven is not how much you have, but how you used what you had, and how you gave it away to the glory of God. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

QUIET our minds and hush our hearts, O God, that we should make the most of this opportunity to give some measure of undivided attention to the interpretation of your Holy Word. Through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, Who when He came, came preaching. Amen.

John 4:37-38

We have never taken, to the best of my knowledge, a survey or an official poll regarding it, but just for the record and as a matter of curiosity, how many members of this parish who live in this area have a garden? - - a real, honest-to-goodness garden, that is, where such things are grown as: green peppers, Italian tomatoes, Silver Queen corn, broccoli, pole limas, garden peas, cabbage, celery, carrots, red beets, squash, rutabaga - - name any of them, half of them -- come now, how many members do you suppose in this parish have a garden, a real, honest-to-goodness garden?

Just in passing, as this sermon was being prepared I took the parish directory and I leafed through its pages, using a limited number for a sampling, and I came up with an estimate-of-sorts that less than 8% of the households of the more than 1200 in this congregation have people who dig...plant...weed...cultivate a vegetable garden. To the best of my knowledge, we don't have a single farmer in this congregation -- a man who day in and day out concerns himself with the soil and the good fruits of the earth. The closest thing we have to it is the man who sat in the fourth seat from this pulpit this morning, who come November will be 90 years of age - - some thirty years ago he retired as a farmer in Virginia and moved into the metropolitan area. But he continues to have a garden, a magnificent garden. Much of the fruits of the good earth that are in evidence today have come as the result of his labor.

Now because less than 8% of the members of this parish have even so much as a garden plot, and in view of the fact that we don't have a single farmer in this congregation, we'd have every reason in the world except one to eliminate this day in the calendar of the church. It would be a very easy thing for any number of you to have come today and never missed at all the fact that there is such a thing as the Festival of The Harvest.

I can readily understand where a person could come to church today, or any place where there happens to be such a service as we have, and be somewhat surprised and less than impressed by what we mean to accomplish. There was a day, you see, when people anticipated the harvest. I can remember in the home in which I grew up, my father, God bless him, would eagerly anticipate the seed catalogue, and very carefully he would make his selections -- what seeds they would order as he thought in terms of spading that garden of ours....and then after the seed-time he'd look forward to the first time when we'd have lettuce from the garden, to the first time that we'd have green peas, to the first time that my mother prepared beets -- fresh from the garden. After the sowing of the seed and the planting of the garden you look forward to that first time! . . . but now -- who looks forward to it? You can go to the supermarket at almost any time of the year and buy carrots, and red beets, and lettuce -- thanks to modern refrigeration, thanks to modern transportation, thanks to our imports from other countries - - - we have these things the year around. Who looks forward to the first time when they can have a mess of green peas?

....and come March or April, when Winifred makes ready the festive board for our Sunday dinner, that corn that she will serve will taste every bit as fresh as the day Uncle Karl plucked it from the field and then minutes later the Heim girls processed it and got it ready for the freezer.....

Because this is true, for any number of people the harvest has lost its meaning.

I grew up in a community that was agrarian in nature. Springtime of the year, what was the common talk? - - "Got your garden dug yet?" - - "Have you purchased your onion sets?" I remember as I smile broadly, when the son of the parsonage of that church to which I belonged went away to school, and then his buddy took him to his home-town which was in a rural area. And when he came back he said, "Dad, I can't much tell you what the sermon was about, but I can tell you the price of potatoes!" - - - that's what they were talking about at that particular time as they thought in terms of the fruits of the earth.

So I suppose it could be a very easy thing this morning, every reason in the world except one, to eliminate from the calendar of the church the Festival of The Harvest. But by deliberate design, when I first came to you more than a quarter of a century ago, I asked you to establish in your calendar of festival observances this day. And I hope that you'll never have done with it, for the

simple reason that the fact of the harvest is not being superseded, and that the fact of the harvest cannot be ignored. For the fact of the harvest represents a fundamental truth that there can be no gathering without a seed-time.

There's a text for this sermon on this day, the words of our Blessed Lord as recorded in the 4th chapter of the Gospel according to John, verses 37 and 38: He is quoting something that He had heard, a platitude, or a truth, which is as real as life itself....says our Blessed Lord -- for here the saying holds true!

"One sows, another reaps.
I sent you to reap that for
which you did not labor.
Others have labored and you
have come into the harvest
of their toil.
One sows, another reaps."

I suppose if you were to read that point-blank you could say to yourself, Unfair! - unfair! - - you could read it bitterly, you could read it cynically -- why should a person not have the benefit of his hard labor? - - if, preacher, you're trying to establish the fundamental fact that the harvest follows the seed-time, then why can't he who sows also be the person who reaps? -- but it's not always so! - - it's not always true!

-- Unfair! - one could say, and one could respond
to this truth cynically and with bitterness.....

I'm reluctant to tell you this for the simple reason that you might misunderstand me -- don't you dare! -- but I have, as you know, more than ordinary interest in what happens in the Middle East---I stem from Middle East stock....and I remember when I was first privileged to go to the Middle East back in 1953, which seemed then a comparatively short period of time from the partitioning, the establishment of a particular place where those who had known so much persecution could have a homeland. But I remember discovering shortly after I arrived on the scene the bitterness and the hostility and even the hatred of displaced Arabs who looked over the barbed wire fence, and all that separated them from what was once theirs -- no longer theirs -- the field from which they had removed the rocks, the ground which they had worked so hard in order to make it productive - - it was no longer theirs. This was only one facet of it, don't misunderstand me, but we created a very serious problem, there is no question about that. And trying to help someone, we created an agony for somebody else. One sows, but they didn't -- they were denied the chance of reaping the benefit of their hard labor -- somebody else could. So they could cry, "Unfair!" -- and bitterly so.

It's a truth written large, no matter where you may look. One sows . . . another reaps. I cringe a bit when I admit it as a fact: one generation earns it -- another generation spends it - the sad reading of life where some people are concerned. You forgive me if I still bask in the glow of that respite of those three weeks amid the hills-of-home - - - when I rode down the streets of Williamsport I went down Third Street, not far from the home where my parents used to live. From the corner of my eye I look back to that magnificent corner where John Peters had built his house, close by his meat plant. The last recollection I have of John Peters -- at 90 years of age he was out in the yard digging a hole to plant a tree, under whose shade he would never rest! The old man labored hard to dig that hole. One sows . . . another reaps.

Reaping is a lot easier than sowing. If ever I learned the meaning of hard work I learned it as a child. My father, of blessed memory, and mother, I think in their lifetime they had lived in five different places and every place where they lived they always made it a point to have a garden. And even my father, at 90, in declining health, living in that mobile home on a concrete slab, found it possible outside, no matter how stony the ground, even to the very year that he died, to try to till the soil.

We youngsters who were part of that household learned very early that spading a garden, maybe a third or a fourth of the size of the room in which you find yourself now, was not an easy thing - - bending over and weeding, the back-breaking chore of brushing off potato bugs - - that's where I learned that work could be hard.

The harvest was easier, considerably easier. And that is the first lesson we need to learn. When we gather the harvest we reap the benefit of the hard work of those who preceded us.

The second lesson: there can be no harvest without the sowing. It can't possibly be otherwise. We permit ourselves to think that it could be true, but it isn't. I read a parable some time ago of a man who was fed up with the life that we live in this day and age, when he saw all the evidences of man's inhumanity. He walked into a shop. He had reason to believe that he could buy something there and he said to the person behind the counter, "I'm sick and tired of man's inhumanity to man -- give me now some of the fruits of the spirit, make it possible for me -- I want love, I want peace, I want joy, I want gentle-

ness -- I want all these fruits of the spirit!" . . . and all the person behind the counter could say: "I'm sorry. We don't stock fruits. We deal only in seeds."

We mustn't forget -- there is no such thing, despite the label on the little box "Miracle Grow" -- there is no such thing as an instant harvest, there is no such thing as fruits falling down from Heaven hopefully fashioned just like that! Despite all the marvels of science, it takes time, and hard work, in order that a harvest may be possible. But in this marvelous passage of Scripture our Blessed Lord is saying, "There ought to be some sense of identification easily between the sower and the reaper, even though they may not be the same person." For he who sows should know a measure of joy in the realization that some day there will be those who will reap the benefit.

We are indebted, every single one of us, to those who have labored before us. You should know that I don't come to this place, when I allow myself to sit down and reflect, without bowing my head in gratitude for every pastor who preceded me. I know what it is to be a pastor to a people, and I enter into their labors, and again and ever so often I gather the fruit of their endeavors -- their hard work -- their diligence, their prayers . . . and for shame upon any of you, whether you've come lately on the scene or not, if when you've come here you sit down casually, without any measure of gratitude for those who in earlier years labored in behalf of this place, who labored in this vineyard called Saint Luke -- that little band of people, less than 200, who built a place of worship four times their need. As they planted, as they worked, they thought in terms of the future, those who might gather the benefit of their hard endeavor. It takes two, you see -- the sower and the reaper -- together -- to know a blessing of what God had in mind.

Occasionally I sit down and I try to survey what's happening in the contemporary scene, and I'm shaken a bit when I read what one has written, that we're now into our third generation of people who are devoid of spiritual values. Why do I tell you that? -- for the simple reason that somewhere along the line the investment has not been made, the sowing of the seed has not occurred. That's why we have people doing what they're doing -- they have no moral framework in which to operate, they have no value system hovering over them that speaks to them authoritatively . . . because when the time came to sow such seed, we were too pre-occupied with other things.

Did it ever occur to you that all too many of us give little thought to our obligation to be concerned with those who come after us? That's the meaning of the harvest -- a time of reaping, a time of gathering. And what if one should come to the time of the harvest and there's nothing there?

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE SONG THAT LASTS FOR A LIFETIME"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

Psalm 104:33

Ray Harmon is a member of this congregation numbered among those who serve the U. S. Government. His assignments take him all over the world. Once when he returned from Europe he brought with him a record....but before I played it he said, "I need to tell you a bit about what I'm placing in your hands." He told me about having been in Amsterdam on a Sunday night, and he found people standing -- many, many deep -- waiting to get on the other side of the door, which was closed. When it was opened, a crowd milled inside that place. It was a church. They went there that night -- not to listen to a sermon....

-- they went there that evening -- not to receive
the Sacrament of the Altar....

They went there that evening just to sing. They filled that church to capacity, singing the great hymns of the Faith -- without benefit of an orchestra, without benefit of a director standing in front of them.....simply the organist at the console moving his fingers back and forth, inspired as we have been inspired to do -- to sing.

When my spirits lag, I play that record, and my soul begins to soar, in much the same fashion as it's been soaring as I have been worshipping with you hour after hour this morning.

Now don't get me wrong -- I have a keen dislike for people who sit anywhere when something's going on, and appoint themselves as a critic and mentally evaluate everything that's being experienced. When one comes to God's House, one leaves the critic's role behind him and one comes only to experience that which is about to take place, whatever it may be, to the glory of God.

But be patient with me -- I found myself somewhat in the critic's role this morning, and if you were to ask me now how I've judged your singing -- on a scale of 1-to-10 -- it's that third hymn that I'd give 11 7/8ths! And when it comes to the substance that's to be attached to the words, it's the hymn that we've just sung! And for shame upon you if you did not give those words the rightful attention they deserve.

But before we talk about that, there's a text for this sermon, brief as it may be. And the text is the 33rd verse of Psalm 104. Said the man who wrote those words,

"I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live."

That could be a long time. And a lot can happen until you die.

During the week Pastor David and I took the Sacrament to two members of this parish family who this fall have been married 76 years! -- not 76 years of age -- but they have been married longer than three-quarters of a century! And right now both of them are closer to 100 than they are to 95. That's a long time. The man who wrote these words said that as long as he lived, come wind or weather, he would sing praises unto the Lord. There's so much that can happen, you see, between the time that we're 20...and 40...and 50...and 60...and 70...and 80 . . . so much of the unexpected, so much of the untoward, even the ugly, as well as the unwanted. But to be able to take your stand and say, "Come wind or weather, count on me to say a good word for my Maker" - - in praise of the goodness of God.

I have an exercise for you that I'm not about to assign. But I'm picturing myself now as a pastor of maybe Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church, Silver Spring, Maryland, when it only had maybe about 35 people coming to church....

....we have our formal worship, and then as a little company, when the benediction has been pronounced, I would say, "Now just a moment, if you don't mind, before you go home I want you to think about what's going to happen between now and next Lord's Day."

....and then I'd say to a person -- perhaps like T.R. Martin -- "Now, T.R., between now and next Sunday I want you, in our behalf, as a matter of discipline, to think very earnestly about the fact of God - - allow yourself a minimum of distraction, morning, noon and night, and contemplate the fact of God....

- think about God as Creator
- think about God in relationship to His world
- think about God in the world that's been
- think about God as He relates to the contemporary scene
- think about things yet to come....

...but no matter what you think, God is the focus of your mind. And after you have done that all week, Sunday afternoon, Sunday night, all Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday - - you come back Sunday, and you give

us the benefit of what you have been thinking about. What would be the bottom line?

You think it's a far-fetched kind of thing to contemplate? Well, let me remind you that the Psalm from which this text is taken for this meditation this morning represents that kind of experience. I have been reading during the month of October the Gospel according to Luke. I have finished it. And now for the time being I'm concentrating on the Book of Psalms. In the judgment of many a Bible scholar it's the Book of Psalms which is referred to as the Bible's Book of Praise.....and as I read one Psalm after another, all 150 of them, I find that the mood goes up and down, down and up. But one theme remains: God is worthy to be praised, no matter what happens. This is the bottom line.

That's particularly true in this Psalm, 104. I wish I could make you privy to the kind of thing that I've been dealing with as I've studied this Psalm in preparation for this brief sermon. In fact I feel so strongly about it, it might constitute the basis for our Bible Study the next time I set aside an entire day as I did two weeks ago tomorrow morning - - when on one day I stayed here from eight o'clock in the morning until eight o'clock in the evening, to meet with any of you who wanted to share my Bible Study for the day. This man, whoever wrote that Psalm, 35 verses -- read it today if you can, and preferably in Today's English Version, whose contemporary style will enable you to relate to it a bit better, perhaps, than the classic King James for which I have high regard.

The Psalmist begins with God as Creator - - he thinks of how God created the world -- majestically and superbly, and then He moves from the heavens to the earth and lays the foundation for the earth... ..and then He creates the streams of flowing water, so necessary in order to sustain life.....
And then he talks about vegetation, that man's table could be spread, that there would be enough food for man and beast alike.....

It may surprise you how the Psalmist, even as he contemplates the fact of God, thinks of how God created the sun and the moon, the night and the day -- he's even so considerate of God as to give God credit of thinking of the night as the means whereby the animals can prowl, in order to find their food at night, and of how God gives the man the day-time in order that he might work until darkness settles in.....so he goes on, from one segment to another, thinking about God.

The dominant theme remains:

God God God . . .

good God....gracious God....kind God...

condescending God....considerate God....

compassionate God.....

And then with a mind that belongs to the historian, reviews the history of the world, so it would seem, and he says there comes the time when God will withdraw Himself from the world, and even if He refuses to breathe upon man, man could die! So dependent is he, man, upon the eternal breath of God -- who gives life to all men! Then he says -- even if He withdraws Himself for a while, He'll come back.....and when He comes back He comes with a renewing, restorative touch.

Now that's the whole gamut - - for 32 verses he goes on like that. And then he comes to the bottom line, and he says: "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live." The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a God worth praising, night and day, year in and year out, come wind or weather -- whether life brings me up, or life brings me down --- "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live."

Now that's why I was caught up particularly when I told you of the substance of the hymn that you sang as I walked to the sacred desk -- that last stanza --

"Praise yet our Christ again;
Life shall not end the strain;
On heaven's blissful shore
His goodness we'll adore,
Singing for-ever-more. "

I began my ministry during World War II. 365 persons from the parish where I began my ministry served under colors. I knew what it was to identify with that conflict that enveloped the civilized world. Not long after World War II I went to Europe on a study tour for almost three months. I recall so well what we experienced in this devastated area and that devastated area, but then when we went to Northern Europe and one of my favorite cities in northern Europe, Copenhagen, we met with a group of Christians. And I said to one of their number, "You were an occupied people. The Nazis determined your life when they came in -- your freedoms were taken away from you -- your life was not your own!" and I remembered especially Kai Monk, a Danish Lutheran pastor, who when he went to his pulpit Sunday after Sunday, while they were being occupied by the Nazis, knowing full well that every word that he spoke was being carefully weighed,

and notes were being taken on everything that he said, and he was possibly running the risk of being mis-interpreted because he was a fearless speaker -- a fearless interpreter of God's Holy Word . . .

...you can't appreciate that, can you? You can't appreciate the fact that when you came here this morning you came with the utmost of freedom? - - you can't appreciate that, can you, because when you came here this morning nobody noted on their register that you "came to worship the Triune God on Sunday, October 23, 1983, at the intersection of Colesville Road and Highland Drive, Silver Spring, Maryland"

...no, you have come with the utmost of freedom.

I remember when we went to Hungary we were told by a friend: a school teacher, a God-fearing person who had to go to a different church each Sunday, lest her position be in jeopardy - - of her mother who took her baby, her child, under cover of darkness to be baptized - - - you can't appreciate that. Kai Monk, the Danish preacher, was told by the Nazi Commandant, "Der Fuehrer, he does not like what you are saying . . . Der Fuehrer, this is contrary to what we believe and what we teach - - we will not say this again!"

...Kai Monk went back to his pulpit, and nonetheless he preached -- with fervor -- the truth of God. On a Monday morning they found his body riddled by bullets by the side of the road . . . that was the kind of thing that many Christian sisters and brothers lived with! -- in Denmark, during the occupation.

So now you can see why I could say, "Tell me, how did you keep your sanity? What held you in good stead?" And he immediately replied, "I'll tell you two things that fortified us: when our King would leave his residence, he would walk the streets of Copenhagen just as we would walk the streets of Copenhagen. When the Nazi in charge of the troops in Copenhagen would recognize him as our King, he would say to him, -- 'You are the King -- you are walking here unescorted! Where are your body-guards? - where are your troops?' And our King would say, as he'd look upon us, his loyal subjects, 'Here are my troops -- here are my body-guards!'" And then he said, "Let me tell you something more, even more wonderful than that!

-- whenever we would gather in the Square --

and we could do that -- and there would be 2, 3, 4 or more of us, we'd begin to sing -- spontaneously we would sing the great hymn of the Faith - - this the Nazis could not understand."

I think I'm in good company -- it may have been Martin Luther who maintained that if you want to drive the Devil crazy, you just keep singing! The title for this brief meditation is "The Song That Lasts For A Lifetime" - -

"I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live"

....because I have someone to whom to sing!

....and I have something to sing about!

....and as a Christian I always have those
with whom I can sing!

"Praise yet our Christ again;
Life shall not end the strain;
On heaven's blissful shore
His goodness we'll adore,
Singing for-ever-more."

This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"THE GRAVEYARD BY THE CHURCH"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

John 11:26

The sermon especially prepared for this day in the Calendar of the Church when we commemorate those who have passed from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant, the sermon bears the title, "THE GRAVEYARD BY THE CHURCH." There are two texts today, and you really can't have one without the other.

The one is from the Old Testament, the Book of Psalms, the 89th in fact.

The other text, the words of our Blessed Lord, recorded as the 26th verse of the 11th chapter of the Gospel according to John. Now here they are:

"Who can live and never die?
How can a man keep himself from the grave?"

That's the first one.

But it should never stand by itself and by itself alone. We need the corrective and the word of hope that comes with the second text:

"He that liveth and believeth in me shall
never die."

Now let me tell you about something that happened to me on Thursday of this past week. I was on Wisconsin Avenue in the District of Columbia. As I was driving down the avenue, from the corner of my eye a sign registered, a sign above a store front. I can't tell you exactly what merchandise was on sale in that store, but the sign, the like of which I have never seen before posed a question that brought me up short.

Life has a way of tossing questions at us, and some are tough. And this one really was a tough question. But before I tell you what the question was that was asked by that sign that somebody had put there -- in bold enough letters that motorists driving down Wisconsin Avenue couldn't help but see it -- just minutes before I had seen that sign I had been in a funeral home. Now, this is the way the sign read:

IF YOU COULD SEE THE FUTURE, WOULD YOU CHANGE IT?

A rather foolish question, honestly, because no one can really read the future precisely. And in all likelihood circumstances over which we may have no control may deny us the possibility of changing it. We have to remember that.

But only a minute or two before I read that sign, bearing in mind I had been in a funeral home and the inevitable fact of death now looms upon the scene, as far as my future is concerned, and as far as your future is concerned. And I want to talk to you this morning about this. But realize, please -- it's not to be morbid. I don't know that I've ever felt better in my life, physically speaking, and surely spiritually speaking, I am more in love with my Lord than I have ever been....and I am more aware of His redeeming grace and the hope of Heaven and the assurance of the forgiveness of my sins than at any other time in my years. There's nothing morbid about what you are going to hear.

I would like to think it would reflect something of the manner and the mood of the hymns that you've heard today, which are triumphant and joyful, as we think about those who have gone from the Church Militant into the Church Triumphant.

"The graveyard by the church" . . . I sometimes think to myself, if I had the good fortune to serve on a building committee of a congregation newly organized, and they were to think in terms of their future as a people in God, and also of where they would build their church and how they would build it, I'm reasonably certain I'd be considered something of a maverick -- because I would insist on the agenda that they think in terms that they buy enough ground as they built their church to be able to have a graveyard close by.

It was that way at one time, make no mistake about it. As an example, when Winifred's ancestors first came to this country, seeking religious freedom from the kind of persecution they were enduring in Germany at the turn of the 19th century....landing down there in the Philadelphia area, they trudged their weary way all the way up to north central Pennsylvania, and from one magnificent hill-top they looked across the valley and said, "There's a blooming grove -- that's where we'll establish ourselves." They cleared the ground, and they especially cleared a place for their meeting-house, their church. It's still referred to as the Meeting House, because that's where they came to meet one another, that's where they came to meet in God's name. But close by -- they also cleared enough ground for the graveyard, because they realized and realized full well that the day would come when they would have to meet their Maker.

Any number of people I know shy away from cemeteries. Evidently their forefathers did not. Say it again and ever so often -- when staking out ground for a church, they invariably included enough space for a graveyard close by. They kept it in full view of every worshipper -- coming to church or leaving church when the service was over. It was inescapable. They had to go by it. And presumably always the message was the same, as they looked at the grave markers, the message the same -- the voice from the dead undoubtedly saying: "As we are now, so one day you too will be." But remember this, and remember it well, from the Christian perspective there is always more than what meets the eye. For us there is this wonderful thing called the eternal dimension which is life, eternal life in Jesus Christ.

Now the graveyard by the church does a number of things for us. It reminds us that death is inevitable -- people do die. People whom we know die. But there are people who deny the fact of death. One of the most difficult assignments that I've met with in my ministry is to deal with someone who refuses to accept the fact that his loved one or her loved one who is critically ill -- the signs are such that he or she will not recover -- to get someone to accept the fact that someone you love and someone who loves you is going to die.

People shy away from the fact of death as they shy away from cemeteries. Louis XV, the King of France, foolishly ordained an order that death was never to be spoken of in his presence. Nothing that could in any way remind him of death was to be mentioned or displayed. And he sought to avoid any place, he'd avoid any sign, he refused to look at any monument which in any way suggested death.

You may identify with this, perhaps, in one way or another and with varying degree, as I tell you about Noel Coward's play entitled "This Happy Breed." In it -- really now -- he exposes our evasiveness of death, and evasiveness of the fact of death. As an example, in the third act, scene one:

-- Sylvia says, "There's not so much to do since Mrs.

Flint passed on."

Frank replied, "I do wish you wouldn't talk like that, Sylvia. You make it sound so soft!"

Sylvia replies, "I don't know what you mean, I am sure."

Frank continues -- "Mother died! Don't you understand?

First of all she got the flu, and that turned to pneumonia, and the strain of that affected her heart, which was none too strong at the best of times, and

she died! -- nothing to do with 'passing on'
at all!"

Ethel adds, "What are you yelling about?"

Frank responds, "I'm not shouting about anything at all.

I was merely trying to explain to Sylvia that
Mother died. She didn't pass on, or pass over,
or pass out. She died."

It's sombering, of course it is. And can seem to be so final.

Well, that's the first thing that the graveyard by the church says to us: people die. It's inevitable.

And then when you wander around inside the church yard, the graveyard, as some of us are wont to do, we're fascinated not only by the names but we're also fairly intrigued by the date of birth and the date of death. And we're deeply moved sometimes to see how long some people lived...and how short a time some people lived. I, perhaps more than any person in this room will be able to identify with that list of names that will be read before the altar before the benediction is pronounced today...those members in this Saint Luke family who have gone to be in God's nearer presence since last All Saints' Day. One of them an infant -- life was scarcely begun until she breathed her last, and another, at the opposite end of the spectrum, well into her 90's -- for some of them, death came suddenly, without any warning whatsoever.....for others life just dragged on, almost interminably with its terminal illness. And one among them, would you believe it, I dare say willed to die, as she said to me, "I've gone through so much before and this time I'm not coming back, Pastor!".....as much as to say, "Dear Lord, You've given me so much, I'm grateful - - I surrender."

You walk through the church-yard, you walk through the graveyard, you read the grave marker -- the date of birth, the date of death. Living is what happens in between. That's the totality of the experience, and death is a part of that, every bit as much as birth. And the graveyard by the church reminds us that there will be a limit to the time that we will spend here on earth, and some day it will be up! And we need to respond to that reality.

There was a President of Brown University who once delivered a chapel talk entitled -- this very fascinating title -- "The Pleasure of Economy" -- what in Heaven's name did he have in mind? I'll tell you: he pointed out that in the games and the sports, the pleasure is to be found in demonstrating what can be

done within the limitations that are imposed. As an example:

- in baseball -- the player at the bat is limited to three strikes. If he were allowed a dozen, the game of baseball would lose its interest for players and spectators alike.....
- the golfer is permitted one drive at each tee, and he must make the one ball go as far as he can. If he could keep on driving until the ball went a distance which satisfied him, golf perhaps, too, would be a very boring thing.....

The graveyard by the church reminds us that death is inevitable and time is all we have until it comes - - make the most of it. Live it to the full.

There was that youngster, God bless him, who wanted to say something noble to a kind old man, and she simply blurted out, "May you live all of your life!"

...one of my favorite Latin mottoes when I was a student of Latin was "do vivimus vivamus" - - while we live, let us live!

That leads me to remind you of the eternal dimension which is introduced by our faith in Jesus Christ. Life to be lived to the fullest is life as we know it as Jesus Christ possesses us and claims us and we order the days of our years according to His good pleasure. The graveyard by the church says there is more than simply living - - there is life in Christ!

George Eliot in her poem, "The Legend of Uball" showed an unusual imagination as she mused on what it must have been like when word of the world's first death registered on the human consciousness. Imagine it -- living at a time when death occurred for the very first time! Said she, "It seemed a life was never loved before; Now each man said, 'I will go, and come no more.' No budding branch, no pebble from the brook, no form nor shadow, but new dearness took, from the one thought that life must have an end, and the last parting now began to send effusive dread through love and wedded bliss, thrilling them into finer tenderness."

...because we know there is a limit to our days here on earth we rely as never before on the strength of Jesus Christ so that we can see life more tenderly, and with greater depth.

William King has written a play, "The Dark At The Top of The Stairs" in which Reuben and Cora Flood are a couple of Oklahomans who have been afraid of the future all their lives. The future is represented for them subconsciously

by the dark at the top of the stairs. Their little boy, Sonny, very consciously sees and fears this darkness and doesn't like to hide it. Sonny speaks for most of us when his mother asks him, "Sonny, why are you afraid of the dark?"

...Sonny answers, "'Cause you can't see what's in front of you,
and it might be something awful."

Cora tries to comfort him, and at the same time builds him up as she says,
"You mustn't be afraid."

Sonny replies, "I'm not afraid if someone is with me" - - and he holds
out his hand, and he and they go up the stairs together.

The graveyard by the church reminds us that Jesus Christ says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes unto the Father but by me." - - and He stretches out his hand, and He walks with us. There is no evil that can befall you - - the last enemy is death. And Jesus said, "I will conquer it for you." That's what the graveyard by the church says to us - - and unites us as a blessed company -- the Church on earth and the Church in Heaven -- the Communion of Saintsand we Christians, when we remember the graveyard by the church, do not simply talk about the dead. We talk about the Blessed Dead.

There are two things that Phillips Brooks said -- only two things, that we need to know about the dead:

One - - that they are - - - it has happened;

And the second thing - - they are with God.

This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"REFLECTIONS ON THE END OF A CHURCH YEAR"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

halitus 2:20

Unashamedly I confess to you that I am numbered among those who have difficulty controlling their emotions. Many a time I wish it were otherwise. I can become mad at the slightest provocation. On the other hand, my soul can surge with joy at the first hint of anything bright and beautiful. But presumably, it is more difficult to control my emotions when I realize that a chapter is ending in my life and another chapter, perhaps, is about to begin - - whatever that chapter may be in the past or whatever it could be in the future.

I remember so well how I reacted emotionally when I learned of the death of my younger brother, the first time that death had interrupted our family circle. No question about it, a chapter now was over, never again to be repeated....and by the same token, when my parents died, I responded, reacted emotionally at the realization: now I was numbered among the older people. No longer would I think in terms of them being older and still with us. A chapter had been written. It was over. A new chapter was beginning.

I found myself watching the motion picture, "The Emigrants" . . I was deeply moved. I related, of course I did, because my father had come to these shores from the Old World. There was so much that touched me deeply, but nothing quite as poignant as when the couple had decided to emigrate to America, the decision had been made--it was irrevocable.

....and they gathered together what family belongings they felt they could bring with them, loaded them on the simple cart, and as they were heading down the lane, we're shown the father and the mother standing at the doorway of the house, and the old man cups his hands to his lips and shouts,
"Go slow when you go through the gate!"

....as much as to suggest: Think deeply...reflect...a chapter is ended - this part of your life is over. No matter what the new will bring, this has been concluded....

Unashamedly I tell you, I do respond emotionally, and particularly so at the realiza-

tion when something ends, something else is about to begin.

It's in that manner, it's in that mood that I come to this sacred desk this morning, on this, the last Sunday in the Church Year, and the sermon bears the title, "Reflections On The End Of A Church Year," and the text is from Galatians, the 2nd chapter, the 20th verse:

"I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

The Church does have such a thing which is known as the Calendar of the Church Year. It ends today, it begins anew next Sunday with the Advent-tide, a series of four weeks preceding Christmas, during which we concentrate upon the coming of Christ into the world . . .

. . . and then there's Christmas.

. . . and after Christmas, the Epiphany, when we remind ourselves that the Christ who came is not ours alone, but He's the universal Lord, the Messiah meant for all people

. . . and then we recognize His Baptism, His Transfiguration ...a period of six weeks when we think upon His life, His teachings, His arrest, His denial, His betrayal, His crucifixion . . . then the glorious Easter Day....

. . . and after that Ascension, then we come to Pentecost...
...and the longest segment of the Church Year which we have just completed today - - the time when we benefit by the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ as it roots and blossoms and nurtures in our lives, and within the life of the Church.

Now having said all of that, these twelve months since last Advent have run their course. And those of us who have gathered in a place such as this within this time frame -- hear me now and hear me well -- could have listened to 52 different sermons, 52 different occasions when someone stood here and interpreted for us the Word of God -- not dealing in trivia, not bringing your attention to the event that happened last week and focusing upon that and that alone, but allowing the eternal Truth of the centuries to speak to the present moment. That's been happening here, this twelve-month period when the person who stood at this sacred desk interpreted for us the precious Word of God.

Within this same period of time, as we've gathered within these walls, we've

sung some 156 hymns -- for the most part all of the stanzas, and sometimes, as a man whispered in my ear going out, with a measure of satisfaction, "Some hymns have seven stanzas!" . . . we've offered some 200 prayers when we've set aside a particular portion of the worship experience to address God with our concerns . . . as a company of believers we've asked for pardon no less than 160 different times . . . and 64 opportunities have been given to us to receive the Sacrament of the Altar, and some of you have been present without fail every single Sunday of this Church Year which is being concluded.

Now, because this is true, and because this has happened, because we come to a chapter that's ending -- so what? What do we have to show for it? Has it made its dent, has it made its impact upon the fabric of our souls? Essentially the bottom line is this: Is Jesus Christ any more real to us now than He was a year ago? Good question. Needs to be asked.

Four weeks and more have run their course since we had that delightful series of Parish-wide Fellowship Suppers in Bieber Hall, when we were introduced to a different format -- and people spoke who had never been given the opportunity to speak before regarding what Jesus Christ means to them and how He's becoming increasingly real to them through relations with this Family in God known as Saint Luke. I was deeply gratified, how again and ever so often in the course of that week this person and that person spoke up and said how they remembered the day they joined Saint Luke, and they were told in no uncertain way that we covet for every one of them that within a year they could honestly say that Jesus Christ had become more real to them.

As I scan the congregation now, I am amazed and much impressed by the fact that I could stop at each pew, if I were to walk the length of the Nave right now, and look at each of you and recall how you were part of a New Member Group series in this congregation within the past quarter-of-a-century and more. I hope you will never forget it, that one of the very first things that was said to you the very first night that you gathered as part of a New Members Group, something to this effect: We are here tonight not because we are primarily interested in adding your name to the roster of this congregation -- as much as we want this church to grow in every way, and numerically as well -- and we're not primarily interested in having a Lutheran made out of a Baptist, or a Methodist, or a Presbyterian, or a Roman Catholic -- - this is not our primary concern. It's purely incidental, if it has any relationship at all. The primary concern is that when you come this way, and you become a part of this Family in God, that Jesus Christ should become in-

creasingly real to you. That's how we justify our existence. And that's what we are: a company of people in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

There's the text for you. The Apostle Paul put it that way:

"I live, yet not I, but Jesus Christ lives in me."

I don't know if you appreciate that as well as you should, honestly I don't, and I'll tell you why. I have reason to believe that had you been in the company of that codger who was traveling in the hills of Tennessee some decades ago, and as he trudged along he came to a house - - you can picture it -- ramshackle, worn-down, the porch in need of repair, the creaky rocker and the woman on it....and as he passed by he shouted out to this woman on the rocker, trying to find his bearings in that section where he was traveling by asking, "Who lives there?"

...and she replies in all innocence, and perchance with a measure of conviction, "Nobody lives here except me and Jesus."

Be ashamed of yourselves, you would have branded her a bit of emotionally unstable, that's what you would have! For most people don't talk that way. And if it's a confession that you want, I don't know that I've ever replied to anyone who knocked at the parsonage door at 919 Highland Drive, making some kind of a census perhaps, or trying to ascertain whether he was lost or not by saying, "Who lives here?" -- honestly now, I'd never said to him, or to her, "Nobody lives here but Winifred and me and Jesus." - - I never said that. And in all likelihood you wouldn't either, if somebody knocked at your door. And for shame upon you -- not that you don't use that language, but you would not think in those terms! That's the indicting thing! - - that we fail to see ourselves in proper focus, even as in the Epistle Lesson for today, one of the greatest verses in the entire New Testament.

- - Paul's marvelous way of thinking of Jesus Christ:

"In him"(referring to Jesus of Nazareth) "-- all the fullness
of God was pleased to dwell"

-- that's absolutely magnificent!

To think that God could dwell in human form. And the Apostle Paul applied that same fundamental truth to himself, "I live," said he, "yet I don't live. It's Jesus Christ who lives in me."

Several things have happened in the course of this morning to which I am going to make you privy. Two people have gone from this service, one at 8:30 and one at 9:30 - - and out of all who filled the Nave at each hour, two people said to me:

"He's more alive in me, Pastor, than He was." And one fellow who now lives in Texas, he said, "We're removed from Saint Luke, but what you started growing in us is still growing!" And that's exactly the way it ought to be! And to this end we give ourselves!

- - and the other thing -- at 8:30 this morning there were two people who came and identified themselves as having been members of this congregation more than thirty years ago. He was on the Church Council, he was active in gathering funds in order that this Christian Education unit could be built, so sorely needed in those days. And before I knew it, I hope I can say with understandable pride, a word that has to be used very carefully . . . we spoke, he and I together, of the changes that had taken place in this building. He was impressed by this gracious corridor, he was impressed as he walked into the reside Room, and I said, Yes, this is part of the three-level addition, we call it the Enlarged Facility, and I wish we had time in the brief stay that you're going to be here, we'd like to take you to Hollywood, our Saint Luke Ministry in a Rural Setting" . . . it all happened so easily, so innocently.....

For shame upon me! but I did not first think in terms of calling his attention to the staff member that I'd introduced to him, whose face was radiant with the joy of Christ! All the other things did not need to be mentioned. I could have said, "This is our greatest asset - - this is the evidence of what we have been doing since you have been gone -- nurturing those in whom Jesus Christ dwells." No question about it.

So a year has come, a year has gone, never to be repeated. So what? Is Jesus Christ more real to you now than He was before? How can you tell if Jesus Christ is more real to you? Ask yourself that question. Maybe you'll think in these terms: He's more real to me now than ever before if I take Him more seriously than I've ever taken Him before.

Are you aware of the fact that there are any number of people who live and die, and never take Jesus Christ seriously! You can tell if Jesus Christ is more real to you than He was a year ago if you have a greater appreciation for people whom you've met in whom Jesus Christ has come alive - and you can detect it, and you can call it by its rightful name. Who was the man who said, "The greatest ambition that I have for my son is that one day he should meet a saint." You can tell if Jesus

Christ is more real to you if you can see Him made evident in the lives of other people.....you can tell if Jesus Christ is more real to you if there are people who can sense His peace and His power and His forgiveness in your life.

It was a strange sort of tribute. She said to me once, "Pastor, my family tell me that since I became a member of Saint Luke Church I have been easier to live with." If you want something as mundane as that, begin at that point! The acid test is: the kind of person you've become.....and we're meant to become more Christ-like. It's possible.

Paul closes his thought in the text there, that 20th verse of the second chapter of Galatians, by saying, "This is possible - - I live in Christ and Christ lives in me - -- not because of my faith, but because of the faith that God has in me." Beloved, God says it's possible - - "I can take over your life!"

- God says it's possible - - "I can live in your heart!" Give Him a chance! And to that end we begin a whole new year all over again. And God willing, a year hence any number of you will be able to testify, "I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me."

...this I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME: TO A CERTAIN PLACE"

QUIET our minds and hush our hearts,
O God, and make us fit to think your
thoughts, through Jesus Christ Thy
Son, our Lord. Amen.

Mat 2:12

It's almost a half-century, but I think I can see it as though it were yesterday: a gentleman with shoulders bent, passing St. Boniface Roman Catholic Church on Western Boulevard in Williamsport, Pennsylvania ---- he bows his head, he tips his hat.....

...I can see it as though it were yesterday -- as precious a person who has ever been affiliated with this congregation, Loretta Bell, of blessed memory -- training new members of the Altar Guild, and as she stands before the altar in this place, she never so much as speaks beyond a whisper.....

...it was Tuesday of this week when more than a hundred precious junior high young folk, at the end of their time together -- some of them having been here almost four hours after school, their energies depleted, fresh from their encounter in Bieber Hall -- they walked the aisles of the place where you and I now find ourselves, with respect and reverence.....

...I can see it now on Wednesday of this week, seven women will mark the path that leads to Bethany, our retreat house on the church grounds, and before they enter the door they will read a sign:

"Bethany is more than a house.
It is a place made reverent
by those who think the thoughts
of God."

Say it again and say it often, we do behave differently in certain places because we allow certain places to wear a halo, they are special. And a person, still as of old, is known by the things he reveres and the things he respects.

When I was a student in Seminary, the old professor taught us -- with much gusto -- three things about God. Presumably with Psalm 139 in his hand, he gave us to understand that there are three things we should never forget when we think about God, and he used words that come from the Latin. As an example, he said:

"God is Omnipotent -- there isn't anything that God can't do that God sees fit to do: God is all-powerful...."

....and then he used another word that came from the Latin:

"God is Omniscient....which means God sees everything, God knows everything . . . "

...and then the third thing he said, drawing from the Latin - -

"God is Omnipresent - - there is no place where God cannot be found, God can be found everywhere.

Isn't it ironic to a degree that I, among others who listened so earnestly to him, now in more than four decades have been spending my energies trying to corral people within a certain place -- one announcement after another encouraging them to come to God's House and to find themselves within hallowed walls, to walk a sacred aisle, and to stand within the shadow of an altar. If God can be found everywhere, you and I are the first to admit - - but that doesn't mean that everyone finds God anywhere. And God knows that! And human as we are, God has ordained that we go to certain places, special places.

This is the first in a series of four sermons to be preached from the Saint Luke pulpit during the Advent-tide, and each one will deal specifically with "HE CAME" - TO A CERTAIN PLACE"

" - IN A CERTAIN PERIOD"

" - TO CERTAIN PEOPLE"

" - FOR A CERTAIN PURPOSE"

Here is the text....we'll be dealing with it repeatedly, Matthew, 2nd chapter, verses 1 and 2:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, Behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and we are come to worship him."

Matthew and Luke make much of Bethlehem. They're the ones who refer to it specifically. When God saw fit to give us Jesus Christ, He related Jesus Christ to a specific place, a certain place. . . .

...the star that gave the sign for the three kings, it kept

shining "until it stood over the place where the baby was"

...the shepherds, startled by the song of the angels, were given the divine directive - not to just hit the road and go aimlessly . . . no. "- to Bethlehem" - specifically.

The Old Testament is replete with this kind of thing, where again and ever so often God calls His people to certain places. We're human. And we need to be in special places where it's made easier for us to think the thoughts of God. Isn't that one reason that some of you keep coming back -- to this place? You relate to this place, you relate your thoughts of God to this place, so that when you turn your back upon this place, and you go to be His obedient servants in the arena where you need to live out your faith -- but you begin from this place.

In the early years that I came to you, she was a member of this congregation. She is now, incidentally -- not quite so incidentally -- an ordained pastor of the Lutheran Church in America. But there was that night when her 'Swede' was winging his way to Norfolk...and the terrible storm, the terrible crash...and he was killed along with others. She wrote me a letter --

" . . . My world fell apart, Pastor. And to put it together again I went back to certain places. I re-traced my steps
- I went back to the place where he proposed to me
- I went back to the place where we were married
- I went back to the place where our first child was born . . . "

...the need to go back to certain places, where there were certain encounters, where something very special happened. There is this need on the part of every one of us. And God understands it, and God allows it, because we are that human.

When we've gone repeatedly to the Holy Land, there's one town that I always want to include in the itinerary: Jericho -- for one reason in particular: to stand there within the shadow of a sycamore tree that you can still find in a certain intersection in Jericho, and when I stand there I am reminded of the Biblical truth -- that man Zacchaeus. You remember the Bible story . . . legend has it that when he became old, even to the very day he died, Zacchaeus came each day at sundown and stood within the shadow of that tree. And some youngster in the community noted that man's strange behavior -- always just like clock-work -- coming there, the old man standing and meditating in the shadow of the sycamore tree . .

"Old man, why do you come here?" the boy asked.

The old man said, "I come back here repeatedly because it was this place where I first beheld

the face of my Saviour. I need to come back to
this place."

When I was a camper at Nawakwa my soul would thrill when we'd go to Upper Temple, and I remember a man saying, as he conducted devotions, "I need to come to a place such as this to find God, to make sure that I don't lose Him when I'm not here." That's why God allows us special places, special encounters, to make sure that we don't lose Him when we're not in this special place.

As I walk away from the sacred desk I must tell you this story, I'm constrained to tell it -- as poignant a story as I've ever heard, I think I can say that without too much exaggeration.....

. . . His name was Jamie. He lived in an English village. He worked some distance from the parish church. Spiritually sensitive, he would do this very unusual and truly remarkable thing -- during his lunch hour he'd reach for his cap, his lunch, and he'd cycle away until he came some distance to the village church...he'd park his bicycle, doff his cap, walk with reverence inside the village church, kneel at the prayer desk, and after a little while -- this was his ritual, this was his habit, so we are told -- before he'd get up from the prayer desk, he'd look Heavenward from the spot where he was kneeling, and he'd say, "Jesus, this is Jimmy."
...repeatedly he came to that special place, to have his special time with God.

You want to know how this story ends? Listen carefully:

...one time after he had been to the village church, he gets on his bicycle, cycles away back toward work, but unfortunately he's stricken down, fatally. There were those who came to his help. And as they knelt over him, they saw this glorious look upon his face and they heard him say softly, as he looked at them -- "Can you hear it? Can you hear it! Can you hear it! -- I just heard it! I just heard it! -- the voice -- 'Jamie, this is Jesus.'"

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME: AT A CERTAIN TIME"

(Matthew 2: 1-2)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son
Jesus Christ, our Blessed Lord.
Amen.

Let it be said, and perhaps repeatedly so, that a sermon is not worth preaching that does not bring honor and glory to God and at the same time does not speak to human need. That's the prefatory statement. Let me say it again: That sermon is not worth preaching that does not bring honor and glory to God and which does not at the same time speak to human need.

Having said that, I'm constrained to tell you the saddest thing that I could say as I think of a particular incident. I can name the city. I cannot name the hotel. It was New York....

.....I cannot tell the floor upon which the person had been residing overnight. I only know that they found his body down on the pavement after he had done what he had deliberately decided to do, to end it all. They found this note in his room, sensitive person that he was: "I have been assessing life from the pros and the cons;
the cons outweigh the pros. Sorry . . ."
...and then he signed his name.

I can identify with that person. Shamefully I admit to you, I have had my moments when I've assessed life -- and temporarily have been inclined to think that there's more going against it than for it -- you notice I said only temporarily. For there is such a thing as the dark night of the soul. To all intents and purposes this morning this sermon deals with a period in history, a certain chapter in the life of a particular people. But what is true of this chapter in history for a particular people, I dare say can also be true for any one of us at a particular time in our lives, granted that we are sensitive, granted that we would hope for more than what we see.

The text for today's sermon is the same as the text for last Sunday's, next Sunday and the Sunday after that: repeatedly at this time of the year I'm reading the same chapter of Scripture in my personal devotions. It's the second chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and as a matter of discipline I try to read

it as though I had never read it before, hopefully that some measure of insight will come to me that had not occurred to me in previous readings. Now hear this:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who is born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him. . . "

There are seven words that need to be underlined, seven words that have come and spoken to me as they have not spoken to me before: "in the days of Herod the king." As I underline those seven words I am pin-pointing a particular chapter in history. And as I read Matthew and Luke I am impressed all over again with how the Gospel writers deal with specifics. Jesus was born in a particular place...

--- he was born at a time-period in history

--- and Jesus Christ was made known to particular

people who responded to what was being revealed...

No matter how you read the Scriptures you cannot help but become impressed eventually with the way we deal with specifics. Now for our purpose this morning we need to remind ourselves that God deals in history.

In order for you to better appreciate that you should know that there are some people who have given up believing in God because they've never been able to relate him to history -- their god is a god who is remote, and he doesn't identify himself with this world, he doesn't identify himself with us. He is detached. And I suggest to you, a god who is detached, and a god who is remote is of little value to us. The Scriptures reveal a God who identifies Himself with us, who stoops to our level...and if you want me to put it crassly -- who is willing to get messed up with all the wickedness that becomes this world. I cannot read it otherwise.

Seven words: "In the days of Herod the king" . . .

You ought to know the kind of day it was when Herod was king. I have my moments when I hate Herod. I began to despise him when I was a Sunday School youngster. What other emotion could I have when I read that he was the man who ordered the slaughter of the innocents, who would have killed Jesus Christ if he'd been able to have done it? How could I respond in any other way? What kind of a man was he?

You'll know something of the time in which he lived when you see how his lengthened shadow was cast -- malignantly -- over his day and age. He started out rich in promise. And all of us who want to be good need to take heed...at

first he was kindly disposed toward the Jews - - he even melted his own precious gold plate in order to gain money in order to feed the hungry Jews of his day. But then as he became older something happened. He became suspicious of people, he was constantly being threatened and intimidated by people, he became very insecure. The madness set in. Insanely jealous of his wife, he had her killed.... ..suspecting his mother-in-law, he had her killed....three of his sons whom he suspected he had killed.....

"in the days of Herod" - -

...that kind of a person, who cast his shadow malignantly throughout Judea.

Something you will find it difficult to believe, he knew the kind of person he was, he knew he was despised. He was vain enough to hope that when he died people would cry, and lament. They wouldn't for him - - but he'd guarantee there would be weeping when he died, so he issued a strange order - - certain people were told that when Herod would breathe his last, at that very moment distinguished Jewish leaders were to be killed, so that the Jews would cry at the same time that Herod was dead - - not for him, but they would cry. Now that's the kind of man that you had in a position of authority, with influence over people. The world had produced that kind of person.

If I were God . . . make bold sometime to think in those terms . . .
If I were God, how would I feel toward a world that had produced a Herod? -- Herod the wicked one, Herod the wicked king? I would have been inclined to think, it's not worth it. I would have washed my hands of the whole affair, I would have said, "Let the world go to Hell. That's the way they're heading!" But fortunately you and I are not God. God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is never less than love, and because He's never less than love, He never gives up on us. He's always willing to begin all over again.

I remain tremendously impressed each time especially I use the words in connection with the Holy Communion . . . "Our Lord Jesus Christ in the night in which He was betrayed -- took bread -- took the cup, and gave it to His disciples..." ..on the very night in which He was betrayed He gave Himself completely. That's the kind of God we have. It's a matter of historical record. He did come.

I read in an interesting manner the books that I'm given or I choose. It may be of some interest to you to know that I read very carefully the jackets -- what's on the front, inside a back cover, back side of the jacket - - to indicate what people want me to know that the author has in mind in the writing of his book. And every now and then some people very cleverly deal in sub-titles so

that the sub-title might give a very strong indication of what we're not supposed to miss. Sometimes a sub-title is far more revealing than the title itself. But here's a sub-title you could never give the Christmas story. Of the Christmas story you could never say, "IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE." You may say to yourself, it's a wonder that it ever did. Christmas does not deal in fantasy or myth or fiction. Christmas deals in fact: "In the year that Herod was king Jesus Christ was born."

Let me give you a little bit of a history lesson if you don't mind. The year was 1809, a very discouraging chapter in history....

...in that year Abraham Lincoln was born

...in that year Charles Darwin was born

...in that year William Gladstone was born

...in that year Cyrus McCormick was born

...in that year Felix Mendelssohn Bartoldy was born

...and a few years after 1809 -- 1814 -- when soldiers were attacking a certain village, a mother snatched her child and ran for sanctuary into the church, and the youngster that she grabbed and took to safety was a youngster whose name was Verdi.

...in a year when there was so much of the discouraging and the despicable -- this was going on....

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king . . ." -- that's when He was born.

And I say to you, in the dark night of your soul, when you're inclined to use the word that doesn't belong in the vocabulary of the Christian, when you're inclined to say it's hopeless -- take heart, my friend, God is still at work, and He's at work in our behalf. He makes it possible for angels to sing, He makes it possible for at least one star above all others to shine. And somewhere in this wicked world He finds a virgin, a maiden pure. That's something to think about -- a God who never gives up. This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded).

"HE CAME: TO CERTAIN PEOPLE"
(Matthew 2:1-2)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

First the text, then I want to tell you about a friend of mine.

The text is the same that's being read each of these four pre-Christmas Sundays, written in the second chapter of Matthew, the 1st and 2nd verses:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem,
in the days of Herod the king, behold
there came wise men from the east to
Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is
born king of the Jews, for we have seen
his star in the east and are come to wor-
ship him. . . ."

Now about my friend.

You may think that what I'm about to tell you is totally unrelated to the text, but don't be too sure. My friend was Doc Colvin, the farmer's son who went off to college nobly intentioned to becoming a missionary. But somewhere along the line the decision was made that he would become a physician. We would refer to him with affection and esteem in Williamsport as 'the eminent pathologist' of the local hospital. The farmer's blood that coursed freely and fully through his veins remained throughout his entire life - - he got up early in the morning . . . that was evident when he came to visit us, when we lived at the parsonage at 9219 Manchester Road.

...when he came to the breakfast table his face was beaming -- he made known to us that he had heard it! -- he had walked around the parsonage grounds, almost an acre as some of you know, with its tall pine trees, its more than 23 dogwoods, and the grand extravaganza scattered with azaleas . . . he had heard it -- was it a thrush or was it a lark? . . but he had heard it. And he gave us to understand that it was there, and it was unusual that it should be there. But he had heard it.

We were amazed, of course, that he would have heard it, it meant so much to him, and he was somewhat disappointed that seemingly we were insensitive to what he had discovered.

Why did he hear it -- this thrush, this lark -- why hadn't I heard it? Why was it so important to him -- why was it less than important to me, because the next morning after he left, I did not get up at the break of dawn and walk around the parsonage grounds, hoping to hear what he had heard....and sadly enough, I now tell you, I can't even remember what he called that bird -- I did say to you, was it a thrush, was it a lark? -- he knew! And he had heard it. I hadn't.

I'm inclined to believe that he heard it because he had schooled himself to listen for that sort of thing, and no matter where he went he went with ears that were attuned to nature.

Now having said that, while Christmas is primarily the story of one person in particular, it also includes other people, certain other people -- shepherds and wise men, to name a few.....

-- shepherds, remember, were the ones who heard angels sing,
and obeyed

-- wise men were the ones who saw the star! -- and followed it.

Now the question that can't be ignored: Why were they the ones to listen and to obey? Why were they the ones to see and to follow? Good question, really. Why did my friend hear what I didn't hear? Why was he so impressed? I wasn't.

To serve our purpose better, who were the wise men -- who saw the star and followed it? We really don't know, and even the names that we give to them come out of legend. Where did they come from, what country in particular? We have a way of naming on a map where we think they came from. But we don't know....

...how many were there? -- ah, you say three. But we really don't know there were three. We simply imply there were three because we say they opened their gifts -- gold, frankincense and myrrh, and we like to believe that each one had his special gift -- so we say "the three kings."

The Scriptures, importantly enough, always deal with what's basic for our understanding. The Scriptures give us to understand, in no uncertain way, that whoever they were, they came seeking...whoever they were, they had seen a sign, and what is more, having seen the sign they followed it until they came to the place where the child was lying.

It occurred to me more than once that you can't very easily hide a brilliant star. There it is! -- the whole world ought to be able to see it. Presumably many people saw the star. The wise men are remembered because they're the ones who saw

and followed the star. They discerned a meaning here, they were enthralled that over, above and beyond them there was something exceedingly wonderful that they could not ignore, to the everlasting credit of these men, they discovered that life eventually would reveal to them -- let me say it to you carefully -- something over, above and beyond them -- that would be worth following.

Any number of us, you see, glue our eyes only to those things that are horizontal, we concern ourselves overmuch with that which is near at hand -- or if perchance when something wonderful does occur, we get caught up with the ecstasy of it and are thrilled beyond measure -- for the moment. It's a sensation that grips us. And then that's it. Not so the wise men. They were caught up by it, and persisted, and with patience they persevered until they discovered the ultimate.

I don't know how you size up Christmas, but let me encourage you to think that Christmas is God's dealing with the ultimate -- the finest and the best that God could ever give us was made known to us in Christmas. The Apostle Paul has spelled it out dramatically and profoundly when he said, "In him (referring to Jesus Christ) -- all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell." -- it's complete, it's full, it's perfect! Say it repeatedly: Christmas deals in the ultimate. The wise men having seen the star, they persevered with patience until they came to deal with the ultimate -- beyond which there would not be anything better.

For shame upon any number of us, we settle all too easily for something that is less than the ultimate. We have our own way of pre-conceiving something and then permitting ourselves to think that we've arrived, and beyond which there isn't anything better. Let me tell you this: I was fascinated by San Francisco long before the first time I ever visited the city, and as a student in college I was enthralled when they told me about what was then the hotel in San Francisco -- the Mark Hopkins. And people told enthusiastically about going to the Top-of-the-Mark and seeing the whole city from the Top-of-the-Mark. And that's where I wanted to go when I first went to San Francisco...

....and as I went through the door someone said to me, "But they have built a brand new hotel across the street, and the view is even better from that point!" Did I cross the street? No. I had settled so easily at the level at which I was going to stay, I had made up my mind that I would settle for the Top-of-the-Mark.....

It could well be that the view across the street was far better, but I was very comfortable with the level that I had agreed upon for myself. There are any number of people like that, who settle all too easily for that which might be less than the best! Not so the wise men. They kept on, and they trudged wearily, no matter how wearily, persevering with patience until they would arrive at the place where God dealt out an ultimate.

We need to remind ourselves also -- Scripture doesn't tell us how long it was from the time they first saw the star until they arrived at Bethlehem. You don't know! There are those who encourage us to think that perhaps it was months, even years. Can you say to yourself for the moment, what they had to endure to keep the vision splendid fresh? -- all the ups and downs, and the downs and the ups that took place from the time they began until the time the Scriptures say, "They came to the place . . . "

For shame upon any of us -- any number of us, that is, we have our moments when we see the vision splendid -- the moment of ecstasy occurs, and then it can fade. There are some of us who take our religious experience in spurts -- it comes, and it goes. And we're quite content to forget about it in the meantime. I don't think the wise men were like that. They followed persistently, they followed faithfully. Let it be said again and often -- those who found meaning in Bethlehem were people who did not just casually get there. They just didn't drop in to pay a visit. Whoever ended up in Bethlehem ended up there because there was determination, and there was discipline, and there was faithfulness to the vision splendid.

Have done with the notion if you permit yourself to think, even for a little while, that God has a few, as the poet says, whom He whispers in the ear, that there are only the elite who have this inside track with God. You believe that kind of thing at peril, my friend. The star that shone in the heavens shone in the heavens so that all could see it, and I'd go so far as to say that when the angels sang, the song could have been heard throughout the world...but only a few, a precious few, saw the star and followed faithfully . . . only a few heard angels sing and said to themselves, "Let us even now go unto Bethlehem -- let's do something about this, let's go all the way, and see this thing which has come to pass, which God has said is happening!" That's the first thing I need to tell you about the wise men: they saw -- and they remembered, because they followed, faithfully.

I'm intrigued by the fact that they're referred to as the wise men. They had a concern for wisdom, wisdom which is not of this world. They were attracted by the sign from the heavens -- a wisdom that's over and above and beyond them, a wisdom which comes, if you please, from God.

You know that I honestly believe that love is the greatest thing in the world. But wisdom is also something to be prized. My years have taught me that the world suffers from lovelessness -- no question about it. But the world also suffers from stupidity and foolishness and folly. And we need a wisdom, not of our own making -- we need a wisdom that comes from God.

In my imagination I see the proverbial Man-from-Mars - - he's come to earth, he returns, he's scratching the metallic, electronic helmet of his, and he's thinking to himself as he gives his report to his fellow Martians - -

" Why, it's incredible! -- I was down there on earth -- you can't believe what I've discovered!

-- they build these marvelous cities -- and then every now and then periodically they blast them to bits! You wouldn't believe it!

-- and down there on earth, a harvest here and a harvest there, and fields just growing, abundantly, with all the people need by which to survive physically - - but you wouldn't believe it! -- all the people who are starving!

-- you wouldn't believe it, some people don't even know how many suits they have...and there are some people who don't even have a shirt to wear on their backs -- you wouldn't believe it!

-- and the way they spend their money, not only the way they toil in order to have money -- it's an obsession with them....and then the way they spend it -- their values are so crazy - - a school teacher's salary as over against a merchant of death, people who deal in bombs and missiles. They are clever, but they are stupid.

-- they can launch a space craft, and any number of people can talk to those people way out there..... while some people -- I say this in pure love -- don't

even know how to talk, to say 'hello' to people alongside of them in Saint Luke Church . . . "

Says the Martian who returned after having visited earth: "They can find the way from earth to the moon, but some people don't even know how to get from their house to the people who live next door!"

...said the Martian as he reflected upon what he had discovered on earth -- "They're stupid! They don't know how to get along with each other! They don't know how to care for each other.

They're stupid, they're foolish, they're unwise. . . . "

For herein is true wisdom, when people pay attention to each other, make the most of each other, and set their affections on the things on which you can't place a dollar sign. To the everlasting credit of these men who kept following the star, they were wise, because they honestly believed that they would find, some way, in some way, that would give them an answer.

While Christmas is primarily the story of one person in particular, it also includes other people, certain other people -- shepherds and wise men, to name a few. Shepherds, remember, the ones who heard angels sing, and obeyed....

...wise men, the ones who saw the star and followed it.....

Now the question that can't be ignored. Why were they the ones to listen and to obey? Good question, really. Before I turn away from the sacred desk this morning, I'm constrained to tell you, my heart is filled with joy as within the past five days in Saint Luke Church I discovered all over again the kind of person who has seen the star and is following it persistently -- I have discovered it within you, certain people who have heard angels sing, and have obeyed what they have heard. They're already dealing with the ultimate.

. . . it can happen. And Christmas tells us that it does happen -- it did happen. And if it isn't happening now, then the fact that it did happen is of very little value.....

This I most certainly believe.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"HE CAME: A CERTAIN PURPOSE"

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God our
Father and from His Son Jesus Christ,
our Blessed Lord. Amen.

The 60's and 70's have come and gone, and when some of us remember that turbulent period we think, more and more at least, how we re-discovered at that time banners....posters....buttons and bumper stickers. Some of you could have kept a catalogue of all those different bumper stickers that you read as you waited at the intersection, on the car ahead of you. The humdinger as far as I'm concerned is this one:

GOD IS BACK - AND HE SURE IS MAD

You may want to keep that in mind, because He is coming back.

For three Sundays now we have been striking the theme of Advent, and as each sermon has been preached in turn we've used the past tense -- He came, in a particular place....He came, in a particular period of time....He came, to certain people in particular. But in each case you'll notice we've used the past tense. We talk about Mary, who had a Baby....

...we talk about Joseph and Mary, who went to Bethlehem

...we talk about stars that shone

...we talk about angels who sang

...we talk about a time that was.

And all of that serves a purpose.

Dwight L. Moody, the great evangelist, used to say that he had little interest in talking to people about the Second Coming of Christ, because as far as he was concerned, there weren't enough people who dealt with the fact that He had already come! But it occurred to me during the week that perhaps I've done you a disservice this Advent, when in three sermons out of four we've concentrated upon something in the past tense. We have been talking about the Jesus who came.

If Advent means anything at all, and you know the word does mean coming, it needs to be cast in this manner: He who came - comes! - - and will come again. When you talk about coming, you're talking about one who's already arrived, you're talking about one who is always coming to us. And by the same token we must deal with the tremendous truth that He will come again.

We've written this coming business into our creeds constantly. Every time we come together we stand and declare our faith by saying: "He will come again - " We're located not too far away from the national headquarters, or international headquarters, of a particular denomination of the Christian faith, who write into the very title: Adventist - - they are people who exist and their only justification for existing is to gear all that they believe and all that they do to the fact that Jesus Christ is coming back!

As I stand at this sacred desk this morning, I'm constrained to talk about the fact that He will come again, not simply that He did come. And I suppose if I would have given you the assignment last Sunday to read the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and you would be anticipating this morning's sermon, in all likelihood 95 - 98 - 99% of all of you would never have come upon the text which serves as the basis for today's sermon. It's not found in the Gospel writer who talks about angels, stars, shepherds and inkeepers...Mary and Joseph and Bethlehem -- it's found in the Gospel according to John, who mentions none of these things, and it's also found in the Gospel of John in that section where John is talking about the last chapter in the life of Jesus.

Now when you and I deal biographically with someone -- well, let's put it this way, if you were commissioned to write a biography of somebody, where would you begin? Like as not you would follow the traditional pattern -- you'd talk about the antecedents, you'd talk about the place in which the person was born, and you'd talk about the circumstances that were prevalent -- when that person was born - - you'd begin at the beginning - " - he was born at such-and-such a place, at such-and-such a time, to these parents . . . "

I would not begin that way. If I were writing about someone great and marvelous, I think I would be inclined to deal with that person in the prime of life, in the fullness of his life, when maturity had finally set in, because that's when the true impact of that person's life was being made effective. Now because that is true, at least for this person in particular, hear now this text -- the 37th verse of the 18th chapter of the Gospel according to John -- coming now, remember, to the last chapter in the life of Jesus Christ, the last week in the life of Jesus Christ. He's being challenged by someone who is not about to believe in Him. And clearly and calmly, without any hesitation, Jesus Christ speaks what ought to be unforgettable words for us. He said:

"To this end was I born"

. . . "To this end was I born" . . .

I carry around in my wallet a piece of paper on which is written something that I hope I will never, never forget. It was given to me by one of the three people in this world with whom I have a relationship as I have with none others. He had read it somewhere, and he was right, he believed it would hold me in good stead on more than one occasion. As I recall what's been written there, it goes like this:

- - There are two great beginnings in the life of every person who's made his mark: one, the realization that he was born at a particular time; and the second, the realization of why he was born.

There are two things we must always keep in mind - - the fact that I have come into this world, and there's a reason for it, a purpose to be served. He has never really lived until he's discovered why he is here. Was it Thoreau who used to say the tragedy of life is to come to the moment of death and to discover that you never really had lived at all.

For three Sundays we've talked about the Christ who came, the place where He came, the people to whom He came, the particular period of time in which He came. This morning I am in duty bound to remind you that He who came will come again.

So He's coming again. So what? How do I prepare for His returning? Good question, really. Some people are fascinated with how He will come again -- trailing in clouds of glory, the artist with all his imagery tries to picture it for us. That's never done much for me....

...some people when they think of His returning try to pinpoint the exact hour - - how ridiculous! Scripture maintains that none of us will ever know, not even the angels in heaven know the precise time....

So don't waste your energy in that kind of thing.

But I would suggest with all the strength that my soul can command that you think of why He will come again. What's the purpose to be served in His returning? Well now, let's deal with two things: Why did He come in the first place?

Why is He going to come back?

He came in the first place because He loves us. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . ." God made us, you know. God made the world and He called it good. And the crowning glory of all of His creation was a human being . . . and He endowed him with the freedom of choice. And very early in the game those two people in particular got their heads together and they said, "We'll use our freedom as we want to use it - - we'll indulge in this kind of thing, we'll ignore God - - we'll decide." Well, God made us with that opportunity. God's the

the great risk-taker, and the decision was made.

Even very early on: "God, we don't much care what you think. We'll do it our way." And from that moment on Paradise becomes lost, and we start inching and heading, eventually very rapidly, toward Hell. The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the kind of God who says, "I don't much care." The God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the one who says, "Let them go to Hell" - - He isn't that kind of God!

That three-word definition for God remains: GOD IS LOVE: God is never less than love, and love cares, and love has a concern, and love has a duty that it will fulfill. God never says, "I'll turn my back on the world. God always keeps His eye on us, and out of pure love, and He says, as Ezekiel said, "'I will seek them and I will save them.' I will do for them what they can't do for themselves: they can't save themselves. They're stupid, and they're foolish, and they're wicked. But they weren't meant for Hell. I made them for Heaven. And I'll come to them, and I'll pay the price, and I'll show them the way."

God is love - - that's why He came, to save us. Jesus Christ did not come as just another teacher....Jesus Christ did not come as just another example...Jesus Christ did not come to introduce another philosophy, to lay down another program, to enunciate another principle. Jesus Christ came in person to save us, to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. That's why He came. Now He's going to come again. Now ask the question: Why will He come again?

In James it is written, "Behold, the judge is standing there now."

We've written it into our Creed, and let me finish it for you, I can finish it for you earlier - - "and He will come again to judge both the quick and the dead." The element of judgement remains in our theology. You shy away from it, don't you? Some of you come back to this church Sunday after Sunday because you are sure you're not going to hear a sermon on hell-fire and brimstone and damnation. You don't want to hear that kind of preaching. I don't preach it because I don't believe in that kind of thing -- I don't preach it because it doesn't do a thing for me. I don't talk to you about the torments of the damned - - I do hope I talk to you about the bliss of the saints, and the prospect of Heaven, while we deal with the fact of Hell.

Scriptures maintain, you know, that there is a dividing line. Using terminology that meant much to people in His day, Jesus talked about the sheep and the goats on one side - - the fundamental fact remains, there will be the line of demar-

cation - - and on one side the saved....and on the other the lost. There's no question about it, there's no in-between, there's no straddling of the fence. He will come again, and He will judge - - and we'll know.

Do you want me to give you a concept of Judgment that does a lot for me? It's rabbinic, it comes to us from our Jewish friends. It has nothing to do with hell-fire, brimstone and damnation, it has nothing to do with those traditional concepts of the damned and the saved. But an excellent interpretation of Judgment:

. . . you and I have come to the end of our journey. God gave us life and He gave us a certain amount of time to be here, and then it's all over. And in the moment of death, the rabbi tells us that God's angel will stand in front of us, confronting us, and with a broad wave of his hand He will simply say to us: "Well, what did you make of it?"

....that's the awesome moment! It's all over! You can't go back and repeat it! Life is a once-in-a-lifetime experience! There's a beginning, and an ending...on this side of the Great Gate. And when it's all over - - "Well, what did you make of it?" He-who-comes-again will ask that question.

He's already come as Saviour, let's keep saying that to ourselves -- He's already come. We're already numbered in the ranks of the redeemed if we understand anything at all about the Christian experience - - He doesn't have to come again, He doesn't have to repeat Calvary. The redemptive deed has been done! -- He came to save us....He came to love us. "I've already given you this love, you can already have it - - it's yours!" And then in the time of Judgment, the question is: What have we done with it? How would we respond? - - "What did you do with the love I gave you? What have you done with the life by which I endowed you?"

This morning at 8:30 it seemed to me that when I walked away from the pulpit I left a negative tone, and that troubled me, never more so than when our precious group of high school people who were in the choir sang their anthem: "There's joy in the morning! - - There's joy in the morning!" Make no mistake about it, my friend, we can be numbered among those who when we die, it is possible for us to have a peaceful look upon our face. You want a definition of a Christian? A Christian is a person who can die with a happy look upon his face! - - for he knows the love of God - already!

I need to read this for you. I read it for you in one of the first sermons that I ever preached to you. It has to deal with Judgment. Whenever I go to London

I know a tremendous measure of satisfaction in going to St.-Martin's-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square. Studdert-Kennedy was a great man of God, a very unusual preacher. He pictures a cockney soldier in the moment of Judgment.... these are his words for it:

"I seem to stand alone beside a solemn kind of sea;
Its waves, they got in my inside,
And touched my memory;
And day by day, and year by year, my life came back
to me . . . "

(but now Kennedy, you should know, there constitutes now in the poem a parade of faces, a parade of people, and then one of them stops in front of him....she has the eyes of a London prostitute, and God takes him to task, as he remembers it, and God says:

" . . . 'Her soul, she was Mine!'

All eyes were in His eyes, all eyes,
My wife's and a million more;
They were sad, my God, how sad!
With tears that seemed to shine;
And quivering bright with a speech of light,
He said, 'Her soul was Mine!'

And then at last He said one word,
He said just one word: 'Well?'

And then I said, in a funny voice,
'Please, Sir, can I go to Hell?'

And He stood there and He looked at me,
And He kind of seemed to grow,
Til He shone like the sun above my head,
And then He answered, 'No. You can't.
That Hell is for the blind!
and not for those who see.

You know that you've learned it, lad,
So you must follow Me.

'Follow me on by the paths of change,
Seeing what you have seen,
Until at last you can build the IS
With the bricks of MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN.'

That's what He said, as I'm alive,
And that there dream was true.
But what He meant I don't quite know,
Though I know what I have to do.

" . . . I've got to follow what I've seen,
'til this old carcass dies,
For I daren't face, in the Land of Grace,
the sorrow of those eyes!

There ain't no Throne, there ain't no books,
It's Him you've got to see - -
It's Him, just Him, that's the Judge
of blokes like you and me!

And, boys, I'd sooner frizzle up
in the flames of burning Hell
Than stand and look into His face,
And hear His voice say: 'Well?' . . . "

I'm not going to stop at that point.

That same Judge has promised us that He could say, to some of us,

"Well done, thou good and faithful servant.
Enter thou into the joy of Eternal Life."

...and that's a happy thought! Get ready for it!

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)

"ALL THINGS NEW"
(Rev. 21:5)

GRACE, Mercy and Peace from God
our Father and from His Son Jesus
Christ, our Blessed Lord. Amen.

"... and he that sitteth on the throne
said, 'Behold, I make all things new'."

That's the way it's written in the very last book in the Bible, the 21st chapter in the Book of the Revelation, it's the 5th verse.

As I read the Scriptures from time to time I try to put myself in the mind and the spirit of the person whose words I am reading. You need to understand this text in its original setting. The words were spoken by an old man, he was confined to an island, he was separated from the world. He had lived a good life and he was concerned with that world from which he had been separated. In his loneliness he meditated, and God became increasingly real to him - - so real, mark you, that he could say that he heard the very voice of God....

...let me say that again - - God had become so real to him
that he could say, "I heard the
very voice of God."

Now that in itself is a shocking thing. And what is equally shocking is what one could hear God say, as this old man recorded it, and said it was very true. God said to the old man, "Behold, I make all things new."

Now get it again in proper perspective - - the old man was looking out upon a world that was going to pieces - death, devastation and destruction - everywhere to be seen, and yet this God who is speaking to this old man - - God was that real to him, say it again and often - - God saying to him, "All things become new."

Had I been that old man, I'm reasonably certain I would have said, "Run that by me again! What did I hear you say? ---- it can't be! How can you look upon a world that's dying and say, "All things are becoming new"?

Now quite parenthetically, let me tell you, as on occasion I stand before you I become fully transparent - - - my thoughts are not with you at this particular moment. They are 207 miles to the north, in Sycamore Manor, a nursing home operated by the Presbyterian Church. There's a little old white-haired lady there, by this time she's been put to bed - earlier, perhaps, than she'd like, but the help

want to get away as soon as they can from that place, good and honest people as they are . . . so, like as not she's been put to bed earlier than she would like.

She's pretty near 100 years of age - she's old. And yet every now and then when I visit her I discover a brand new dimension that's being illustrated in her life in one way or another. I suppose it could be in her ever sharp sense of humor. As an example, when we had a 90th birthday party for her here in Bieber Hall, I said to her, "Grossmutter, you're nearer to 100 than you were!" - - and she said, "So are you!" . . . which is simply to suggest that you and I must come to grips with the fact that none of us is getting any younger - - we're all growing older. And as we grow older, we look back upon the world of which we have been part, and how do we relate to it? . . . and what do we say to ourselves as we face another year? Now let me ask you this, what is your mood, what is your manner tonight? - right now?

In anticipation of being with you tonight I couldn't help but think, it was only a week ago this very night -- Christmas Eve --- and how for seven different services this church was fairly filled to capacity, seven different times. And the mood last week at this particular time was a mood of joy, and hope, and celebration. Is it just because I'm a bit tired tonight that I don't sense that mood of joy and celebration in your life, or in my own? Could it be that the older some of us become, the more seriously we take the ending of one year and the prospect of another year? Having lived as long as we have, we fight this whole battle of being cynical, saying "so what?" - - another year, more the same -- hassle, struggle, pain, disappointment - - - am I reading you correctly? Or will you take me to task, and say, "You're in error, Pastor, we're excited! The year's over - another year is in front of us! - - a year of challenge, a year of unbounded hope." Can we have it both ways? Can Grossmutter grow older, and yet be challenged by each day?

It all depends how Christian you are. And I'm convinced as I read the Scriptures that the Scriptures are essentially a book of hope. I'm convinced that Scriptures give us confidence. I'm convinced as I read the Scriptures that a word that's exceedingly precious, page after page, so it would seem, is not the word old, but the word new. In fact, a whole section of the Bible carries the name: "A New Testament" - - a new part, a new arrangement, a new dimension. And for the Christian this is always true. The Apostle Paul, as he looked out upon life, reflected on this very theme, that no matter what life might bring to him, he was

constantly being renewed. And as I think of Grossmutter up there, getting pretty close to 100 now, it's a matter of renewal in her life.

....even as I think of all the people she's outlived ever since she's been in that nursing home - I think she's had six different room-mates -- each one has preceded her in death. And how does she respond to that? God bless her, she allows herself to relate all over again to the next one -- a new person, a new situation. And she's renewed by that new situation, that new dimension that it brings. This is simply to suggest that for all of us now who are growing older, as we confront another year, we look upon it as a year of new things, as a year of new opportunities, meeting new people - - even confronting new problems! And we're able to do it as we are renewed by Jesus Christ.

Little known to some people, unfortunately, one of the grandest verses of the entire New Testament is this: "If any person be in Christ he can become a brand new person altogether." According to Martin Luther, a good and proper understanding of baptism is the fact that each day we are born anew by God's Spirit, each day we are being renewed by His love. That's why some of us, even though momentarily we become a bit tired and even though on occasion we have to fight off being cynical, we grasp the meaning of tomorrow, for tomorrow is not just another day -- it's a new day. Some of us have lived long enough to know that for each day God gives the necessary strength - - "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you . . . Lo, I am with you always!" There will be such a thing as the renewing of your mind and the renewing of your spirit.

For shame upon so many of us, particularly those who fight age and growing older - as though the opposite of old is young. Really now, the opposite of old is not young, so much as the opposite of old is new. And that's something entirely different!

"Behold," said God to that old man, " . . no matter what your eyes see, look at it from my perspective - - all things shall still become new."

For the Christian, even in the moment of death, there is the challenge of a new life in Heaven above. And if that is true in the realm of eternity, let it be applied to today, then, as we pass from one yesterday to today, into another tomorrow.

I can hear his voice, I can see the smile on his face, it goes back to the days when we still had people operating the elevator.....as I stepped from that lobby

in that New York hotel the operator in the elevator opened the door - - he smiled broadly, and he was whistling...and as he went from one level to another upward, I said to him, "You're smiling! You're a happy person!" . . . it was early in the morning . . .

. . . and he said to me, "Why not, man? - - I've never had this day before!"

Each day is God's gift to us, each day is a new day. And that's a happy thought.

* * *

(This sermon transcribed as recorded)